



ゼタイの使い魔

古深淵の聖地

ヤマダチノボル

20

Novel Illustrations

【書影】



ヤマグチノボル

1972年2月、宮城縣生まれ。「カナリア〜この娘いを歌にのせて」(角川スニーカー文庫)でデビュー。代表作『ゼロの使い魔』シリーズのほか、角川スニーカー文庫や魔法少女ファンタジー大軍でも著書多数。近刊は『烈風の騎士姫』(MF文庫J)。

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ブログ→<http://heaven-voboru.blogspot.com/>

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PCゲームブランドmanaとMF文庫Jのコラボレーション(ノーブルジョー)!! MF文庫Jから発売中です! 速読プロダクト(DO-RAKU)と最近始めたpavもヨロシク!そして『ゼロの使い魔』20巻おめでとうございませう!

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ゼロの使い魔20

「やっぱわたし、サイトのこと好きなのかな」「悪せるの、そんなにイヤじゃなかったの」「わたし、悪い奴の子なんだわ。友達が悪人を好きだなんて」——ディファニアの『革命 篇』のおかげでエルフの過っ手から離れた才人たちは、ルクシャナの増きである島を訪れる。この世界の生き字引といわれる水曜電に会うためだ。だが有益な情報はなく、やきもちしながら過さうちに、ついにチファがレボリューション!? 一方、ルイズは学園の仲間とともにエルフの土地へ、才人の無事をひたすら探し、迎撃するエルフたちと戦う。世界を巻き込む災厄に翻弄されるルイズと才人は、再び手を取り合うことができるか!? いよいよファイナルへ、カウントダウン3!!

ヤマグチノボルの本

グリーングリーン 魔法/魔法スタンド・バイ・ミー
原作・監修/PROUDER イラスト・くみたまたあき

ゼロの使い魔 1〜20

(イラスト：兎塚エイジ)

ゼロの使い魔外伝 タバサの冒険

(イラスト：兎塚エイジ)

ゼロの使い魔外伝 タバサの冒険 2

(イラスト：兎塚エイジ)

ゼロの使い魔外伝 タバサの冒険 3

(イラスト：兎塚エイジ)

烈風の騎士姫 1〜2 (イラスト：兎塚エイジ)

ゼロの使い魔

《いにしえ
古深淵の聖地》

ヤマグチノボル

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陽光に透き通る海の中を泳ぐティファニアは、まるで人魚のようだった。すうーと伸びやかに、ティファニアは泳ぐ。身にまとった小さなキヤミソールが水にゆらめき、実に悩ましい。

—第二章 海母—



水軍の機橋では、一人のエルフの少女が
厳しい目つきで「燃料補給」の作業を監督していた。
美しい透き通るような金髪に、これまた澄んだ垂れ気味の碧眼。
そうして立っていると、とんでもない美少女にしか見えない。
だが、澄んだ瞳は冷たい何かに彩られている。

—第四章 評議会—



「仲良くあのド・オルニエールで、三人で暮らしましょう。
もし、それじゃ困る、命を奪うって教皇聖下やみんなが
おっしゃるなら……。
わたしもフライパンで戦います。
ミス・ヴァリエールも戦ってください。
おそろく負けるでしょうけど、そしたらみんなで仲良く
天国にいきましょう」

—第八章 突破戦—

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Chapter 1: Boat for Two

After escaping from Adyl, the capital of Nephthys, Saito and the others continued on with their journey in a small boat towed by a dolphin.

Saito and Tiffania, who were imprisoned by the elves, were nearly forced to drink a mind impairment medicine. Fortunately, Luctiana saved them in the nick of time. Along the way Luctiana's fiancée, Ari, attacked them but thanks to a revived Derflinger they managed to escape.

In the small boat Saito began talking about a lot of things with Derflinger, whose consciousness had transferred onto one of Saito's favourite katana.

They talked about everything since the time they fought the Elemental Siblings, and the night after Derflinger got destroyed.

Surprisingly, Derflinger knew all about this. And whenever this was brought up, he would just reply with 'At that time...'. As long as it was related to the elves, Derflinger would remain silent.

——Sasha, who was his Gandálfr, killed her master Brimir.

After abruptly having said that, no matter how Saito tried, Derflinger, who has "restored his consciousness", refused to elaborate on what happened.

Instead, he kept on beating around the bush, as if he was escaping from some great sadness.

As evening came, Derflinger stopped speaking casually and kept silent. Luctiana was already asleep, making deep snoring noises.

The moonlight scattered onto the surface of the sea. The gentle, rippling waves reflected a silver glow.

Tiffania watched the beautiful scene in front of her, and muttered, "It looks like a field made from light."

"Yeah."

"What will happen to us after that?" said Tiffania, who was wearing loose Elven clothing, in a low voice.

"First, we have to find the Holy Land and confirm what were we supposed to find there. Then, we'll report all that information back to Louise," said Saito while looking at Luctiana.

"Even though I feel bad about doing this to her... I feel that this is what we should be doing."

Tiffania stared at Saito for some time, then she hugged her knees with both hands and buried her chin underneath.

"Saito, you're incredible."

"Eh? Why?"

"Because if even you're faced with such a situation, you're still so sure of what you must do. As for me, I can't do it. I would be so scared that my mind would completely shut down."

After saying that, she lowered her head and closed her eyes. It seems that she had fallen into depression again.

"That's because you're a girl, Tiffa. I'm sure you'd be at a loss when it comes to this."

"But Louise and Queen Henrietta are both girls as well. Why is it that I can't gather up my courage during those crucial moments? Even yesterday, I was so paralyzed with fear that I couldn't do anything to help."

"It's not like you did nothing at all. If it wasn't for you, I..."

During his fight with the water dragon yesterday, after seeing Tiffania's chest which was so revolutionary to the point of being evil, he quickly pinched his

nose. Honestly, he felt that this wasn't what he should be seeing. It's not just only big... how should it be phrased? Tiffania's breasts also possessed an incredible sense of balance. On her slim waist, if bigger breasts were to be placed, it would become something like from a manga. It was scary because it kept to that delicate standard; and that's why it was firmly imprinted in his mind, rendering him unable to forget.

"Am I only worth that much?" Tiffania said.

After hearing that, Saito snapped out of his thoughts.

"No... It's not like that!"

"It's okay, I understand."

Tiffania smiled.

"Saito, why are you always that strong? Why are you able to battle so calmly. Was it because you understood the things that you should be doing?" Tiffania asked in a serious tone.

Saito held his chin with a hand, and began to think about it in detail. "To be honest, I'm actually not that calm at all."

"No, I think while there are times when you are scared, you always manage to fight seriously each time. Even though this isn't even your own world..."

Saito raised his head slightly, staring into the distance. The sea lit up by the moonlight had an aura of mystery around it, unlike during the day.

"I think, it's because I have somebody that I like."

"You mean Louise?"

Saito nodded. "I don't want to see her troubled, and her world can also be considered as my world as well. If it's for the sake of protecting her world, then I'd even give up my life for that. Although I'll be trembling with fear, I'd still go on anyway. Otherwise, I think I would've run away."*

"Oh..." Tiffania, who seemed to have understood, nodded her head. "So am I

scared because I don't have anybody that I like?"

"No... I think that everyone doesn't need the same reason to fight. It's just that I'm fighting for that reason."

"If I were to find someone that I like someday, will I be able to be as brave as you?"

"I feel that... You're okay just the way you are right now." Saito said, in an attempt to console Tiffania.

"For me, I think that even if I possess a power that nobody else has... even when there are things that only I can do... if I choose to run away, that would definitely be just cowardly and weak."

Saito kept silent, because that's what he thought as well.

"Tiffa, you didn't run away right?"

"It's the same. I can't do anything, I can only tremble. Yeah... someone I like... how do I know if the other party is the person I like?"

"Err... First, when you're with him, your heartbeat will accelerate."

"Okay, then?"

"And you'd have the urge to hug him."

"Okay, and then?"

"When you hug him, you'd feel like staying like this forever."

Tiffania grabbed both ears, squeezing her eyes shut.

"... Then, isn't that person you?"

"Eh? Eh?! Eh?! Eh?! Eh?! Eh?!"

A flustered Saito looked at her. She looked at Saito with a cute expression that looked like she was about to cry.

"That's because my heartbeat accelerates when I'm beside you."

"Th-That's only because your emotions are unstable."

"And... and... and also..."

Tiffania shook her head. Her face burnt bright red with embarrassment. As this mixed-blood elf with an extraordinary chest was doing such a thing beside him, Saito felt that he was losing control over himself to his evil thoughts.

"Even if you look at it, I'm not that disgusted."

"You... You said that before, right? Really?"

"Yes... At first, I thought that it was because my brain was in a mess, but after thinking about it calmly, the answer is still the same. Although my heart would thump wildly, I don't feel disgusted.

Because Tiffania said this kind of things right beside Saito, he also felt his mind gradually boiling.

"Then... then that's one step before liking someone, right?"

"What's the difference between really liking someone then?"

"Err... the difference is that... I think there's no difference at all."

After saying that, Saito realized something was wrong. But, he was still unable to lie.

"So there's no difference?"

"It might be so."

"..."

Tiffania put her hand to her chest, and sighed.

"Then it means that I really like you then. Then... then what should I do? The person you like is Louise, right?"

"Err..."

"Then it must be a mistake to like you. I'm really a bad girl. I actually ended up liking a friend's lover. Mother Nature and God will definitely not forgive such a behaviour."

Saito panicked. "There's no such thing! It's impossible to control your feelings when it comes to this. This is actually the will of Mother Nature and God."

Saito realized that he said the wrong thing. But he couldn't find another way to say it. After all, there's no such rule that it's a mistake to like someone.

"But it's impossible for Louise to accept this, and Saito you also don't like me, right? Then what should I do with my feelings then?"

Seeing Tiffania being like that, Saito felt conflicted. It's not that he didn't like Tiffania: there was no other girl in this world as attractive as her, but he still couldn't acknowledge this feeling because he had already promised that he would never do anything that would make Louise sad. Saito thought about that time with Henrietta, and mentally shook his head.

However, it would be a lie to say he didn't like Tiffania. After all, like means like. Tiffania was just that attractive, and there was an irresistible, instinctive feeling within him towards her; something felt wrong about denying that feeling.

If that was the case, there was only one way left. He had to make Tiffania lose all her feelings towards me. He must make her feel that Hiraga Saito actually was an incorrigible bastard.

"You know, Tiffa."

"What is it?"

"I have something to tell you."

"Yes?"

Saito clenched his fist, squeezing his words out seemingly in pain with a low voice.

"I... I'm actually a pervert."

Tiffania stared at Saito for a moment, before bursting into laughter.

"I'm serious! I'm totally an out and out pervert! Anyway, it's more like I have a special obsession with clothes and mood... How should I say it."

"Thanks, you're so nice to me."

"Eh?"

"You were hoping that I'd hate you, so you said that right?"

Looking at Tiffania's gaze, Saito felt ashamed.

"Not really... The second part is true though... But whether or not you consider that as perverted will depend on your personal opinion."

"I'm really okay. I just feel better after letting everything go. I will try my best. Even though I might like you... no, I think I most probably really like you, but this feeling and my mission are still two different things after all."

"Tiffa."

Saito had tears in his eyes, staring at Tiffania. On one hand, he was touched by Tiffania's strong will, so he felt that harbouring evil thoughts about Tiffania's chest was shameful; at the same time, he instinctively retorted that her chest was simply too incredible, so it was not his fault. In the end he realized that he was simply too shameful to come up with this warped reasoning.

When he came to his senses, he was already holding Tiffania's hand.

"Woah!"



Just then, the boat shook after passing through a wave. Saito almost fell to the ground completely flat, and naturally pulled Tiffania down as well.

"..."

Tiffania's burning red face was even more alluring under the moonlight.

She stared at Saito. That blue, teary eyes almost made Saito forgot to breathe.

The twin moon hid inside the cloud, and darkness fell upon them. It made one's hearing even sharper. The sound of the boat moving through the waves could be heard clearly.

Saito suddenly felt a warm breath on his face, then he felt a something soft on his lips, and his hair was being gently caressed. This was when Saito realized what he was doing with Tiffania.

During this period, Tiffania said nothing.

When the twin moon reappeared from the clouds, Tiffania pulled herself away. When light returned to the surroundings, she had already recovered into her original position, staring at the ocean.

"Tiffa." Saito said in a low voice.

"It's just your imagination." Tiffania said with a seemingly satisfied look.

"I don't think that's my imagination."

"When the moon isn't looking, you're just dreaming. Even if it was short, I am still okay after this dream is over. Don't worry, I will work hard."

Saito nodded, and looked at the other end of the ocean. The vast ocean in front of him seemed to be silently watching over them. Thus, Saito also thought about working hard as well. For himself, for Louise, for everybody... and for this mixed-blood elf who was looking at the ocean as well.

The blinding sunlight woke Saito up. Seeing Tiffania in a deep sleep beside him with an innocent face, he thought about what happened yesterday. Saito couldn't

help but blush. Then again, she had already specially said that he was dreaming, so Saito had to do his best to act like nothing happened.

Soon after, Tiffania awoke as well.

"Good morning" she said in a cheerful voice, as if nothing had happened last night.

"Good morning."

Saito smiled, and Tiffania smiled back as well.

He wanted to say something, but felt that saying nothing would be better. Thus, he turned towards the ocean. A few bumps could be seen, greatly surprising Saito.

"What the hell is that!"

Luctiana said while controlling the dolphin who was towing the boat, "Oh, the both of you are already awake? This is an island known as the Dragon Nest."

"Island? Doesn't look like one to me!"

What was in front was so strange that it could not be considered to be an island. It looked more like distorted tentacles made of large boulders appearing through the ocean's surface.

Each tentacle was as long as 10 meters, spreading out in all directions.

"Your friend lives here?" Tiffania asked.

Luctiana nodded, "Yeah."

"Doesn't look like any humans or elves are living here?"

"Of course... even elves couldn't live in such a place."

"Then who's the friend you're talking about?"

Luctiana smiled slyly, "You'll know when we get there."

Saito had a doubtful look in his eyes, "This smile really makes me uncomfortable."

Then, Derflinger who was on Saito's waist cut in.

"It might be a scary monster."

"Eh..."

Fear gripped Tiffania upon hearing that.

"It's extremely huge, and there's four or five blue, sparkling eyes."

"Mr. Sword, please don't say anymore..." she pouted, showing a troubled expression.

"And it has ten times more tentacles than an octopus. It'd reach out and grab you in an instant."

"Ah..."

"Hey! Derf! Stop that! Can't you see that Tiffa is extremely scared right now!"

"It's okay~ Even if this were to happen, my partner will protect you."

"Yeah, th-that's right."

Tiffania heaved a sigh of relief, and looked at Saito.

"Relax, my partner is very capable. No matter what monster appears, as long as you show him your explosive thing just for a while, then..."

Derflinger didn't manage to finish his sentence as Tiffania's grabbed the hilt, trembling. Her eyes were wide open, and her face glowed red.

"Un! Un! Un! Un!"

"I-It hurts! Stop that!"

Even so, Tiffania didn't relinquish her grip on Derflinger. As said before, Derflinger was on Saito's waist. Since the boat had a narrow space, it resulted in

Tiffania pressing her body against Saito. Thus, those two logic defying melons kept on rubbing against Saito's arms and back.

Is this some kind of a punishment? Saito, who was about to cry, thought.

—Someone tell me, what exactly did I do wrong!

—Does God have a grudge against me or something?

It must be like that. Otherwise, why would these indecent, thought-inducing melons come and rub against my arms and my back?! Because... because this isn't something I can touch... it's a unreachable horizon... but now such a thing is now pressing on me, this could only mean...

—That this a divine punishment.

Saito looked up at the sky, muttering to himself.

"Saito, what's wrong with you?"

Because Saito with his face pale was muttering something about this is divine punishment, that he was the fallen angel Lucifer abandoned by God, that his body would be completely burned into ashes by the flames of lust, Tiffania became worried.

"It's your fault, you know?" Derflinger said.

"Eh, me?" Tiffania said.

"Yes. That's because you've let him seen those things."

"Th-That's because it's you, Mr Sword, who asked me to show him those!"

"I never thought that you'd really show him. Anyway it's not about the process, but the result. Also, I have a name, so... Hey! Wait! Wait a moment!"

Tiffania's eyes burned with a rare flash of anger, pulled out Derflinger and sliced the ocean wildly.

"Stop it, I will rust! I will rust!"

Even so, Tiffania still silently allowed Derflinger to enjoy the sensation of being bathed in seawater.

Looking at the situation in front of her, Luctiana said in a disapproving tone "What do you take my friend for? You guys really have no manners."

Saito said, "Then be honest with us! It makes me really bothered! You've already brought us out to such an isolated place, what's there to hide?"

After hearing that, Luctiana shook her head and smiled.

"Just as I thought, it'd be better if I tell you once we reach there."

"What do you mean by that?!"

"Because you guys are interesting. Barbarians are really strange and fun to play with."

"These waters are rather special, that's why I said I'd rust, miss!" Derflinger shouted, like being tortured by something.

Saito said unhappily, "Didn't I say that before... I'm not some barbarian. What about you, you long-eared bastard."

The sea was peaceful, the surface sparkled brilliantly like a mirror reflecting the scorching sunlight.

"There was once a huge volcanic island which went dormant around this area, that means we are now above the vent now."

"Oh, no wonder the ocean is so calm." Saito said.

After hearing that, Luctiana opened her eyes wide.

"You're knowledgeable about the ocean as well?"

"No... actually I'm not so sure, it's just something I've learned in school."

"Yeah, you said that you were from another world.... Oh~ So there are schools over there?"

"Of course."

After weaving through the tentacle-shaped boulders, an extremely large towering boulder appeared in front of them. Luctiana ordered the dolphin to stop.

"We're here."

"Huh? Here? Isn't here still in the middle of the sea?"

Because Luctiana had mentioned a friend, Saito thought that the other party would be living on an island or something.

Derflinger said, "Didn't I mention before, it's a octopus-like monster, right? It'd surely grab this mixed-blood elf, and then rub its tentacle all over her. But at that instant when my partner looks at that terrifying chest, he will be all fired up.... Aha! Haha! Waha!"

Luctiana could not be bothered to clarify. "We can only enter through the ocean."

"Huh? Meaning we have to dive into the ocean? How?"

"Honestly... You guys have so many opinions. You at least know how to swim?"

"Err... yeah."

Saito observed the ocean. Although he knew how to swim, diving was another matter and he also had never tried diving underwater directly. Saito looked at Tiffania, who shook her head.

"I was born in Albion, so I've never touched the ocean before!"

"... It can't be helped then."

Luctiana closed her eyes, used her hand to scoop up seawater, and muttered a spell.

"Water... Water who governs the body."

The water in her hand glowed.

"Drink this."

Saito and Tiffania bent down, and drank the seawater. A strong, salty taste attacked their taste buds.

"Then?"

"Now you can breathe underwater, except that there's a time limit."

Derflinger said, "Hey! Add some magic to me as well! This body rusts easily!"

"Yet another troublesome fellow."

Luctiana muttered a spell, and Derflinger's body glowed red.

"Now even if you touch the water, there should be no problem."

After saying that, Luctiana took off her clothes, leaving behind only her underclothing. Her slender body was exposed under the sunlight, and with a splash, she jumped into the ocean.

"Hurry up, the underwater breathing spell won't last for long."

Tiffania worriedly looked at Saito.

Saito shook his head, and stripped off his clothes, leaving behind his underwear.

Seeing that, Tiffania seemed to have made her decision, and gently stripped off her clothes as well. Left with only a spaghetti-strap top, she was no longer someone who couldn't be described as bewitching.

Saito averted his gaze away. Just thinking about "that" without being covered by anything almost made him go crazy. Thus, he kept thinking about Louise's naked body. However, that also had another deadly charm, so Saito's troubles expanded infinitely. In the end, Luctiana gave him a good, harsh beating.

"Didn't I tell you guys to hurry up!"

Saito hurriedly jumped into the sea. However, Tiffania could not gather up her courage, and she stood at the boat staring at the water, terrified.

He reached a hand out, "Don't be scared. I'm here."

After hearing that, Tiffania nodded and jumped into the water. Saito grabbed her hand, and together they dived below.

Although near the surface it was still bright as the sunlight could still enter through the water, but a deep and vast darkness awaited them at the bottom.

Just how deep? Tiffania seemed to have felt the same fear, and held Saito's hand tightly. Saito used his right hand and grabbed Derflinger's hilt, so his body immediately became lighter, and power was continuously pouring into him. However, there seem to be no need to use the power of Gandfalr.

The dolphin that was towing the boat swam beside them. Some time ago, it had already broken free of the ropes binding it to the boat. Saito looked for Luctiana and found her grabbing onto another dolphin's back fin, waving a hand and signalling for Saito and the others to follow her.

Saito and Tiffania grabbed the belt strapped on the dolphin beside them. It began swimming forward at full speed.

Thanks to Luctiana's spell, they could both breath underwater as well. As they breathed in seawater, it'd magically turn into air once it reached the throat. As compared to Tabitha's air bubble to cover the head, this was more impressive.

At first, there was a strange feeling, but they got used to it after a while.

This underwater trip was shorter than Saito had expected. After swimming for a few minutes, a black pillar stretching up above appeared. Could this be one of that tentacle-looking boulders he had seen during the boat trip?

Luctiana's dolphin charged straight ahead towards the middle of the pillar.

What the hell? Don't tell me it's going to bang into that pillar?! Is that dolphin crazy? Saito rubbed his eyes nervously, and realized that there was a large opening.

It seemed that Luctiana's friend was inside, as the dolphin Luctiana was holding onto entered the opening. Soon after, Saito's and Tiffania's dolphin entered as well.

It was pitch black inside, yet the dolphin unhesitatingly swam in a straight path. Dolphins on Earth could use supersonic waves to capture their prey... are the dolphins here the same?

Just when a confused Saito thought about this, light could be seen further ahead. It was as if the dolphins were mesmerized by the light and they swam towards it...

Pasha!

Their heads surfaced above, making a loud noise.

"This is..."

In front of their eyes was a space as huge as a theater. A rotting seaweed-like smell attacked their nose.

"This is the interior of that pillar just now."

"So it's an empty space inside."

Now, seemingly inside the interior of that huge tentacle-like pillar, the water around Saito and Tiffania was like a large well hole and the land above was flat. Faint light covered the walls, probably from the radiating lichens growing on the walls.

Deep within the space, a sound of a large object moving could be heard.

Tiffania jumped and leaned onto Saito. He also instinctively reached for Derflinger on his back.

"Don't worry."

Luctiana let go of the dolphin and held onto the rocks as she climbed towards land. Just then a deep yet loud sound could be heard from within the darkness.

"Who is it? How dare you disturb my sleep?"

"It's me, Mother Sea."

"Mother Sea?"

"Oh... you long-eared rascal... my little girl... welcome."

A feeling that something huge had awoken permeated the area. Heavy footsteps followed, and within the darkness a sparkling deep blue huge body could be seen.

Chapter 2: Mother Sea

In front of Saito and the others, a huge water dragon appeared. Its size was far larger than what Ari sent out to fight, standing at about 15 meters tall.

At first, what was thought to be deep blue scales was actually dark silver upon closer inspection. The smooth silver scales changed into different colours depending on how strong or weak the light was.

There were two horns that looked like corals growing on its head. A few huge barnacles surrounded the base of the horns, and between its fingers and toes were thick webbing.

"What is it?"

It could speak clear, and comprehensible human language. Saito thought about another dragon that was capable of the same thing.

"Rhyme Dragons!"

Tabitha's familiar, Sylphid, was a Rhyme Dragon known to be able to use magic and understand human language.

"Ara, I didn't expect you to know that." Luctiana said, impressed by Saito's deduction.

"That's because my friend's familiar is a rhyme dragon."

After saying that, the water rhyme dragon known as Mother Sea laughed.

"Being able to make my descendant become a familiar, that's amazing."

Mother Sea observed them with her white eyes.

Tiffania stared at the dragon with awe, "Is that your friend?"

Mother Sea narrowed her eyes with a smile, and said: "What a beautiful young lady, it seems that you have human and elven blood within you."

"You can tell?" Tiffania said, shocked.

Mother Sea nodded, "After living for so long, I can basically figure out most things in the world. But not even I can understand what you're up to. That's because you're too casual."

"Then I'll be direct. I hope that you can let us temporarily hide here."

"Ara ara^[1] You rascal! What trouble have you gotten yourself into again? Did you take your elder's book or objects without permission?"

"Of course not. I'm not a kid anymore."

Mother Sea turned to Luctiana, "But you must have taken something away, am I right?"

"Yes, it's them."

Luctiana pointed at Saito and Tiffania. Thus, Mother Sea reared her head to take a closer look at them, scaring Tiffania as she jumped behind Saito.

"Don't worry. I'm not going to eat you."

After a while, Mother Sea said.

"It seems that the both of you are not ordinary humans."

Luctiana said smugly, "They are the Devil's offspring!"

Mother Sea remained silent as she kept her gaze on them.

Saito became nervous. Would this dragon say something like 'This horrible devil!' before eating him.

However, Mother Sea only said one thing. "Welcome."

"You don't hate us?" Tiffania said.

Mother Sea nodded, "I know what your ancestors did to this land, and I probably also know what you're up to."

"Even though you live in this cave filled with the smell of seawater, why do you know so much?" Luctiana said.

After hearing that, Mother Sea took a deep breath. It seems that she was laughing.

"Because I've heard about the Devil from my Grandmother, and even if I'm living in such a cave, after experiencing so much, I naturally can understand a lot of things."

"Your grandmother told you about the things that happened 6000 years ago?"

"Yes, at that time, my grandmother herself was just a little girl."

My god... those dragons have such long lives. Saito looked at the water rhyme dragon in front of him, his heart sighing with emotion. If that idiotic Sylphid was to live for another thousand years, would she be able to give off such an aura...?

"But I don't hate you, you offspring of the Devil."

After saying that, she stuck her nose closer to Tiffania. Tiffania slowly reached out a hand, and touched the tip of her nose.

Mother Sea seemed to be narrowing her eyes with a comfortable look.

"As expected of a Rhyme Dragon, the level of your understanding far surpasses those elders at the committee."

Mother Sea nodded in response to Luctiana.

"I'm different from you elves. We're a race heading towards extinction, and we've already determined that whatever happens in this world is God's will. Whether we're heading towards extinction, or welcoming new guests... even if it's that great disaster, there's no difference."

"Huh! It just seems like you've given up on everything." Luctiana said.

"Haha, long-eared miss, my little girl, do you wish for me to hate the Devil? Or do you want me to stand on their side?"

"Neither side is in the right. Anyway, I just need a place to hide, this is my first objective, and there's another one..." Luctiana said the crucial phrase without beating about the bush.

"We want to take a look at the Devil's Door."

"Shouldn't you elves know more about this than me?"

"Only a small amount of elves know about the details. But you should know where it is, right? After all, you're the living dictionary around here."

"Yes, I'm knowledgeable, but my knowledge is not impeccable."

Saito and Tiffania were disappointed.

"Hey Luctiana, this is different from what you've said."

"What? It's not like I said that this is a 100% thing. Anyway, Mother Sea, do you know who else other than the elves knows about the location of the Devil's Door?"

"No idea. I don't interact much nowadays."

"What a useless ancient species!"

"What useless? Haven't you forgotten about my kindness towards you?"

Mother Sea stood up.

"You can stay here for now, as long as you want, but the air here might be too much for you to bear."

After saying that, loud footsteps sounded as Mother Sea went back to the depths of the cave.

Saito and the rest collected the dry seaweed that was scattered around the area, and used it for fire to keep warm. They roasted fish, shellfish and other types of seafood that the dolphins had caught for food. Although the strong sea smell inside the cave was rather troubling, they got used to it after a while. This was what Saito always believed: that "humans could get used to anything" for a long time.

After resting for some time like that, Luctiana suddenly said.

"Okay..."

"What good ideas do you have now?" Saito said while chewing on a shellfish.

"Just go to sleep!"

"Hey! Long ear! What do we do next?"

"You ask me, but what can we do anyway? After all, Mother Sea said she doesn't know~"

"... Honestly, we clearly don't have time to relax like this."

After hearing that, Luctiana narrowed her eyes with a smile towards Saito.

"If you're too bored, why don't you continue what happened yesterday?"

Tiffania spat her fish out, "Wh-Wh-What!"

Saito's face went red, not knowing what to do.

"All you have to do is to continue kissing like yesterday, no?"

"You saw it?"



"You two are so daring, despite me sleeping beside you two, and that the boat is mine. As expected, barbarians have no idea of shame." Luctiana said bluntly as she stretched her hands.

"Stop being a peeping tom, okay!"

"Huh? What are you talking about? The boat is so small you can't consider that as peeping?"

"I saw it too."

Tiffania fainted when she heard Derflinger saying that as well.

"Aiya aiya ^[2]... And I thought I was sure what kind of a person my partner was, but this time you really went too far. If that pink-haired girl were to know about this, even if you have nine lives, I doubt that would be enough."

"Id-Idiot! That's just an expression of our friendship or something... how should I say it..."

"Oh~ So barbarians do such a thing to friends? Oh~"

Just then, Tiffania sat up, and shook her head wildly.

"It's... It's all my fault! Not Saito."

"Then may I ask why did you do that?"

For some reason Derflinger purposely asked in a special manner, like interviewing someone.

"Because once I looked at Saito's face, I don't know why, but a strange feeling poured out from my heart! That's why I'm unable to control myself!"

"It means that you've fallen for him. My partner is a man who has greatly sinned."

"I really don't understand why myself!"

Tiffania covered her face in shame, but Derflinger continued.

"I say, what do you plan on accomplishing by being such a womanizer?"

Saito said, "I'm not a womanizer! Then again, this is not the time to say such crap! Honestly, just where the hell is that Holy Land..."

"It's the Devil's Door: it's not some Holy Land, or some divine place."

"Whatever, it's the same anyway... Ah!"

Saito pulled out the sword on his waist.

"Hey! Derfli! Didn't you say that you've remembered everything already, right? Then you should know where the location of the Holy Land is."

"You mean that? The place where Brimir was headed for using the Teleportation Gate right? I think I remember."

"Oi, oi, oi, oi, oi! Why didn't you say so earlier?!"

"But, there's a problem."

"What problem? Okay, everybody get ready! We're ready to move on!"

"It should be somewhere around a desert? Or the sea? Anyway, compared to last time, the geology has changed a lot, so even I can't be sure of the exact location."

"What the hell..."

Saito knelt on both knees, disappointed.

"Then what does the place look like?" Tiffania asked.

"Err... well, it's a desert, and there's a large pile of boulders around the area as well."

"We can find a place resembling that description anywhere." Luctiana said, troubled.

"You've lived 6000 years for nothing. Don't make us all excited for nothing!"

"But Luctiana, you said that the place is protected by the elves right? Is there a

rocky place that fits this condition?"

Luctiana stretched her hands outwards, "They can't openly send people to guard the area. That is the committee's responsibility after all. I dare say that even though there may be nothing to that place, it might actually be extremely well-guarded."

Luctiana laid on the dried seaweed she had spread out on the ground.

"What are you doing?"

"Since I'm full, I'm going to sleep."

"Don't fool around, what do we do next?"

"How would I know? Anyway, maybe we might think of something good after we wake up." Luctiana went into her dreamland after saying that, leaving only Saito and Tiffania who could only look at each other.

They had no choice but to follow Luctiana and sleep.

Just like that, they spent three days doing nothing. Since they didn't know anything about the exact location of the Holy Land, there was nothing they could do about it. Although Saito suggested that they head out to the outside world to collect information, Luctiana rejected the idea, saying that they would only end up being captured immediately.

Then again, most elves didn't have the information that they wanted. Being an enemy, it was futile even if they tried.

Returning to Halkeginia wasn't possible either. After all, this place was so isolated that Luctiana would not offer them a boat just to let them return. Even if they succeeded, to bring Tiffania across the desert from there was impossible. Also, Saito had already promised Luctiana that he wouldn't run away. He couldn't possibly abandon her after what she had done for them.

Even so, staying in such a cave doing nothing for the whole day made Saito restless. After all, with the situation being so urgent, the agitation from being

able to do nothing made him unable to sit still.

The dolphins would help gather food for them while drinking rainwater for survival. Thanks to Luctiana's magic, the rainwater didn't taste so bad.

Saito said to Luctiana, "Even if we stay here, we'll be found out eventually, right?"

"The tidal currents of the ocean around here are very complicated, so even the elves wouldn't dare to approach it so easily. No, because there are occasional storms as well, the correct way of saying would be that it's impossible to approach. It's the same for us as well. If it wasn't for the dolphins, we could not have made it this far."

Luctiana kept emphasizing that there's no problem because this is a special place.

"Of course, I'm also thinking about our next move," Luctiana said, "But I still can't think of anything. I think the best thing we can do now is to lie low. Maybe a good idea might just appear after some time."

Because there was nothing to do, Saito often went swimming. He felt that if he didn't move his body, he would feel strangely depressed.

The current season should be near the end of summer, but the water here was warm like the waters in tropical areas. Luctiana said that this was thanks to the power of the spirits, and she also mentioned that the power around this area was rather strong, and so this was why the ancient dragon Mother Sea decided to make this her home.

Or maybe it was like this? The ocean here was like a treasure vault for the living organisms here. All kinds of corals were attached to the rock pillars that stretched upwards. Many different fishes in various colours were swimming leisurely around it. In the midst, large stingrays could also be seen as well. Those fishes seem to have never seen humans before. Even if Saito approached them, they didn't run away.

Because Tiffania could not swim, Saito offered to teach her how to swim. In the

beginning, she was swimming together with Saito. Although it was partly due to Luctiana's underwater breathing spell, Tiffania was also a fast learner, and soon she was able to freely swim about alone. It seems that she had some affinity with water.

Swimming about the ocean that was illuminated blue by the sunlight, Tiffania seemed like an incarnation of a mermaid. Her swimming style was free and casual as she shuttled through the ocean.

The sleeveless tank top on Tiffania, that was bobbing according to the currents, made it impossible to not help but fantasize. Saito couldn't help but think that although she looked like a mermaid, it wasn't possible to find a mermaid with a chest as large as hers.

That day, Tiffania and Saito were freely swimming about when she leaned towards him, and smiled, pointing at the bottom of the ocean.

(Do you want to take a look?)

Saito nodded. The depth of the water was around 20 meters, under the sunlight, even the bottom could be seen clearly.

Tiffania grabbed Saito's hand, and pushed herself forward. Luctiana's dolphin followed behind the two, as if it was protecting them.

At the bottom of the ocean, they descended into a garden full of corals. A large amount of corals were spreading out in all directions, fighting for more space. It was an impressive scene.

In between the corals, colourful fishes could be seen swimming through the corals like butterflies. Upon looking at such a scene, one couldn't help but think that the Holy War or Halkeginia's crisis simply were dreams.

Just then, Tiffania seemed to have found something in between the corals. It was a large, colourful prawn. She reached out a hand and grabbed it.

(This is today's lunch!) Tiffania moved her lips, conveying a wordless message.

Saito, who didn't want to lose to her, started searching for food as well in between the corals. Not long after, he found a blue conch, and grabbed it immediately.

Tiffania smiled as she watched Saito.

She felt that the times they spent together swimming about in the ocean peacefully were something worth cherishing.

-Wouldn't it be good if we could stay like this forever?

If only she could make Saito forget all about the Holy War and Halkeginia's crisis, and live with him here peacefully. Tiffania felt ashamed at having such thoughts. After all, everyone was surely worried about them.

Just then, Saito began struggling after he put his hand inside the corals. She quickly swam over.

(Saito, are you still okay?)

When Tiffania put her hand onto Saito's shoulder, he suddenly fell backwards, causing Tiffania to spin around. Looking closer, it was actually a crab that had clamped onto Saito's fingers.

Tiffania could not help but laugh. Saito laughed as well. At the same time, they realized that their faces were very close to each other.

Her face slowly grew red. She lowered her head. Although Tiffania did such a daring thing last night, but at such a bright place, she didn't know what to do.

Saito seemed to be the same as her. His face was red as he rubbed his nose embarrassingly. Upon seeing Saito being like that, Tiffania felt a feeling expanding outwards at a fast rate within her heart.

-What is it about things being okay once I get courage, it's actually just an excuse.

Tiffania realized that what she wanted wasn't courage, but for Saito to hug her

tightly, whisper sweet-nothings beside her ears, and kiss her passionately.

This instinctive feeling within her heart made Tiffania almost want to cry.

Seeing how sad Tiffania became, Saito was momentarily taken aback.

Is this... all my fault?

Ever since that night when the both kissed, Saito has been trying to maintain their relationship as friends. He thought that Tiffania probably was confused at the moment, and that was why she thought that a person like him wasn't so bad.

Anyway, he had sworn that he'd never do anything that would make Louise sad. No matter how attractive Tiffania was, he couldn't waver.

Saito wanted to say something to change the subject, but it was hard to speak underwater. Even if they relied on sign language to communicate, there was a limit to it. In the end, the both could only stare at each other.

Tiffania could be said to be a perfect girl. Just by looking at her blue eyes with the corners slightly bent downwards, one can't help but have a strong urge to protect her. Also, with a seemingly sad feeling evoked by her eyes, the thought to protect her grew even stronger.

Saito caressed her hair, as if to cool himself down from feeling like that. In the end, Tiffania closed her eyes determinedly, lifted her head and puckered her lips.

Saito felt a magnet attracting him to her lips, but he persevered. So Tiffania opened her eyes, and she blushed even redder, realizing what she did just now. It seems that it was something she did instinctively. Saito felt that Tiffania looked even more sympathetic and cute, and his heart felt even more touched. Saito felt that this was simply a form of torture.

Just then, Derflinger's voice sounded within Saito's mind, and this finally ended the tension between the two. "Partner. There's something approaching us."

Saito turned and observed his surroundings, shocked to see shadows of a group of huge fishes gradually approaching.

Tiffania was shocked as well, and she turned to look at Saito. However, those shadows were already above Saito's and Tiffania's head.

He felt a chill running up his spine.

(Sharks!)

The size and shape of the fishes above looked rather similar to the sharks found on Earth. The difference was that there was a bulge on their head. There were at least 10 of them.

Tiffania pointed at them, as if asking what they were. It seemed like she had no idea what sharks were. After all, she grew up in Albion where sea was a foreign concept to her.

Since there was no time to explain, Saito pushed down Tiffania's head, wanting to lower her body. This was when she realized the sharp teeth on the sharks, and tightly held onto Saito in fear.

The ambiguous atmosphere from before had already disappeared.

The sharks began circling above their heads. If so many sharks were to treat them as food, then even if he used Gandalf's power, Saito might not be able to defeat them underwater.

(Is that fish scary?)

Tiffania asked, using her hands to express her question.

Saito nodded.

(Very scary)

Not long after, one of the sharks noticed Saito and Tiffania who were hiding at the bottom of the ocean. It seems that they used their bulges to emit supersonic waves or something like that to communicate. Soon, all the sharks turned in their direction.

Saito stood in front of Tiffania, and pulled out Derflinger from his back. Although he wasn't confident with fighting that many sharks, he could only try.

Just when Saito wanted to attack the sharks first, the two dolphins shot out from the sides, and slammed into one of the sharks.

With an impact as powerful as a thunderstorm, it knocked the shark out cold in one blow. It sank to the bottom, spinning out of control.

One by one, the dolphins knocked the sharks in a similar manner.

(The dolphins... are incredible!)

Seeing how the dolphins who looked so gentle on the surface could actually be that strong surprised Saito. The rest of the sharks started to run away.

(Amazing!)

Derflinger added, "In the first place, dolphins are stronger than sharks. That's because their bodies are very soft." (No wonder!) Saito swam forward, wanting to give the dolphins a hug.

However, there was no touching scene that occurred.

The two dolphins seemed to have noticed something approaching, turned their heads in the direction of where the sharks were, and swam away in a flash.

(What's going on?)

Saito turned towards the direction where the dolphins were looking at before running away, and jumped in fear. A gigantic creature that looked like a snake were heading in this direction.

"The sharks probably ran away because of this." Derflinger said.

(What's that?)

"A water dragon."

(The same kind as Mother Sea?)

"No, that creature is fierce and easily angered, and it's also quite dumb. However, it should be the strongest living creature near this area."

This water dragon was 10 meters long, it had body similar to a crocodile, and limbs similar to an eel. Rows of sharp teeth could be seen inside its slim mouth.

It stared at them with a fierce look.

(We're not food! Really, we're not food!)

Though Saito tried convincing the dragon, it was futile. As the dragon approached, Tiffania threw herself in front of Saito.

(Tiffa! What are you doing!)

Saito grabbed her shoulders, but Tiffania responded.

(I'll be bait, you quickly run while you can!)

(Don't be stupid! Hide behind me!)

Tiffania put her hand onto her sleeveless tank top, face red.

(It's okay!)

The both were desperately communicating with their hands. It appeared to be something from a comedy or a talk show. But it had nothing to do with that. First, it was because the reason they were being trapped in such a place, was because they were swimming together to waste time. Now there was a high chance they were about to be eaten alive.

Is there a situation as idiotic as that?

Saito held onto Derflinger, and began fighting with the water dragon. Ari's water dragon had a much more similar appearance to a dragon, as compared to this water dragon who had evolved to adapt to the sea. Its limbs had completely turned into eel-like ones, and its body was streamlined. Although there was no way it could climb to land, it still looked more like a proper water dragon seeing how it had adapted.

Thus, the greatest weapon of being a Gandalf, mobility, was greatly limited underwater, but this was not the case for the dragon.

Without bothering to make any intimidating action, it directly opened its mouth and charged towards them. Saito pushed Tiffania down while bending its body, avoiding the attack.

The dragon turned around, and charged forth again.

"Since you can't slash underwater, you can only stab." Derflinger said.

(I know!)

Saito jumped, turned his body horizontally downwards, and stabbed Derflinger at the middle of the dragon's eyes. Due to his awkward posture, water resistance was like a chain limiting his movements, and so there was no impact in that strike. His blade slipped off the tough scales of the dragon.

The water dragon slammed its tail onto Saito.

"Ugh!"

It started circling Saito.

"If this goes on, I have a bad feeling about this..." Derflinger said.

(If we were on land, this bastard would be a piece of cake...)

"Unfortunately, we're underwater!"

Just then, Saito felt his leg being pulled. He lowered his head to see Tiffania with a super serious expression.

(Tiffa?)



Tiffania reached inside her tank top, and pulled it outwards. From Saito's angle looking downwards, he could see this two dangerous melon in full view.

Saito felt a rusty metal smell spreading from his nose. Although Tiffania's face was completely red, it still remained serious, and said to Saito.

(My everything, for you.)

Those words expressed through body language and mouth movements, burned inside Saito's mind.

Something was boiling within Saito's heart.

She said... for me?

Can I?

Of course not.

But being alive is great. Saito thought.

Just like a demon...

The very definition of beautiful.

A chest larger than anyone, and because of her slim figure, it was impossible to hide that fact. Even with such a figure, her character was kind and gentle, like a fantasy come true.

Even if you were to consider all the girls from Earth and Halkeginia, Tiffania is probably the perfect girl alive.

This girl said she liked me.

And she wanted to give everything to me.

Of course I can't accept that. Be-Because I already have Louise. Because of Louise, I don't have a choice! But... but...

Anyway, I'm the luckiest man in the universe.

Now is not the time to be controlled by that sea bug.

(How can I die!)

Saito muttered to himself.

The sea dragon opened its mouth, and charged forth. With an excited yet calm emotion, Saito carefully observed its movements.

Just when he was about to be swallowed, he pushed his body downwards together with Derflinger, the blade stabbing into the dragon's lower jaw in that downward motion. The impact of the stab was greatly enhanced thanks to the force created by the dragon charging forth.

(I did it!)

However, happiness only lasted for a short while.

(I can't pull it out!)

Because it was so deep inside, Saito could not pull Derflinger out. The sea dragon thrashed about in pain, swinging Saito who was holding onto Derflinger left and right.

It began to swim away.

(Hey! Where's this guy going?)

"Partner, I have a request."

(What?)

"Don't ever let go. It would be pathetic if I have to live the rest of my life stuck to that creature."

As the ocean was extremely large, if Saito were to let go, it would be impossible to see Derflinger again .

(I know that!)

The sea dragon swam towards the direction it originally appeared from while

struggling. Saito strengthened his grip on Derflinger. If he didn't grip it properly, he would be easily shook away.

Saito and Derflinger moved together with the dragon for about 10 minutes. During this time, Saito kept trying to pull Derflinger out, but the tough scales clamped onto the blade made it futile. No matter how much strength he poured into pulling the blade, because the dragon was still swimming, creating a forward resistance, Saito could not use his full strength.

"That's troublesome. Just where the hell is that guy swimming to."

(How would I know?! I just can't seem to pull you out!)

"That's because you've stabbed too deep inside."

(You should try to control yourself!)

"You should know I can't move at all."

The corals grew lesser, and sand began appearing at the bottom of the ocean. Under the sunlight, the sand reflected a pale blue glow. Not long after, Saito saw a rock mountain on the other end of the sand.

"It seems that it's heading for that mountain."

(Is that the guy's nest?)

Barnacles, sponges and other unknown sea organisms grew on that rocky mountain. Around it, big and small colourful fishes were swimming about. Within this underwater desert, it seems that this was a condominium for them.

Since the swimming speed of the sea dragon reduced, Saito pushed his foot against the dragon and managed to pull Derflinger out.

After pulling it out, the sea dragon turned back and looked at Saito.

What, do you want to fight again?

Although Saito thought that, but the sea dragon turned his vision away, and swam to the other end of the rocky mountain.

Saito heaved a sigh of relief, and put Derflinger back to its sheath.

He soon realized that he was brought to a rather far place. Upon thinking about swimming his way back to Tiffania, he felt exhausted.

Saito sat at the rocky mountain, wanting to rest for a while.

At that instant, the rune markings in his hand glowed.

(Eh? Why is it glowing?)

"I'm inside the sheath."

(I know that. But it glows once I put my hand onto this rocky mountain.)

Just then Saito realized that this thing he thought that was a rocky mountain had a rather strange shape.

Its circular shape was too perfectly rounded that it didn't seem like anything natural. And at the center, there was a pyramid-like object growing on it.

(This... this is man-made.)

Because of the various sea organisms growing on it, Saito had not realized it, but natural rock mountains did not possess such a shape.

Saito's heart began beating rapidly, and since the rune markings on his left hand glowed when it touched it... this must be a weapon. According to the size and structure, it wasn't something from Halkeginia.

This... this is...

Saito's eyes widen, observing intently what was the object under his butt.

It's length was around a 100 meters, and it's shape was something like a cigar, and it's face was bulging.

Boat?

No... That's not it...

(This is a submarine...)

A weapon in Saito's world. A present from Brimir, Gandalf's gun.

(Brimir-san, this is probably too big for a gun...)

Just then, Saito felt something pecking his back. Turning behind, he saw a dolphin, its round eyes seemingly apologetic. On top of the dolphin was Tiffania.

She jumped off the dolphin, and said with an expression almost in tears.

(Are you still okay?)

Saito nodded in response, then looked at the submarine. He didn't know what country the submarine was from, or what era it was from. This submarine, sitting quietly at the bottom of the ocean, was like a huge watch dog waiting for its owner to come.

Chapter 3: The Last Spear

Saito decided to explore the submarine with Tiffania and Luctiana. According to the growth of the barnacles and the seaweed on the submarine, Luctiana deduced that this submarine should be here for around 10 years already.

In total, its length was at around 120 meters, shaped like a cigar, and at the top, a rectangular bridge resembling something like an old tin can, but with much flatter, was built on it.

Saito wanted to say that this was something from his world, but he couldn't speak underwater. Relying on his hands has its limits after all. Then, Luctiana muttered a spell with an annoyed face.

"This is an underwater communication spell. Now we can talk underwater."

Although the sound quality was lousy, like being transmitted from a damaged speaker, it was better than relying on body language.

"You should've used it from the start if you had such a spell." Saito said.

"Huh? You never asked anyway."

Wanting to enter the submarine, Saito began peeling off the shells attached on the bridge.

"Is this something from your world?" Tiffania asked.

"Yeah."

"That's amazing. Is that a boat?"

"I guess so... It's a boat made to travel underwater."

"This boat must be made from iron, right? A boat made of iron can actually float... Is this something that only Saito's world can do?"

Luctiana smirked, "Hmph~ Even if this thing is made from iron, so long as the inside is empty, it can float. How ignorant. This is nothing! Using this to deal with us elves? Don't make me laugh."

Saito retorted. "This boat can not only float, but it also can travel underwater."

Luctiana's eyes went wide with surprise.

"Eh?"

"I say~ Even though you keep mocking us humans as some barbarians, but can you make such a huge submarine?"

Luctiana said, not wanting to admit defeat. "There's no need to dive underwater!"

"Why do you need to dive underwater then?", Tiffania asked.

Saito racked his brain for the answer.

"To keep ourselves hidden from enemies."

"Enemies?"

"This is a boat used in war, that's why my rune marking is glowing."

"And to think that fighting a war requires diving underwater..."

"That's the kind of world I live in."

Just then, Saito noticed something strange. It was impossible for this broken and rusty submarine to be functional. Basically, it was a weapon that could no longer function as one. So why were his rune markings glowing?

"Why are my rune markings still glowing?"

Derflinger said, "You'll know once you enter. It seems that the submarine itself is beyond repair, but the things inside should be functional."

"What's inside then?" Tiffania asked.

"No idea. But what I know is that there's something inside so incredible that even I'm trembling."

Although most of the shells had peeled off because the cover was rusty, it was still stuck firmly on the bridge. Luctiana used magic, and the rust started falling off.

"The minute vibration of the water thanks to my magic will knock off the rust."

Soon, with a 'pong' sound, the cover popped open, and sank to the bottom.

The hole in front of them was like a gateway to hell. A creepy atmosphere emanated from the inside.

"Do we really have to enter?" Tiffania said, her face worried.

Saito nodded.

Relying on the light created by Luctiana's magic, they entered the submarine. Due to seawater leaking into the interior, everywhere was as rusty as a waste land.

Tiffania, who was observing the apparatuses; the operating lever, the water check valve and the wires among other things, suddenly asked a question.

"Saito, don't you have a plane? Does this boat operate on the same theory as your plane?"

"About that..."

Saito searched his unknowledgable brain for an answer.

Just what does it use to operate?

"No, this thing isn't relying on anything like oil to operate." Derflinger said, answering the question for Saito.

"Oh, as expected as a legendary sword. I remember that you'll have the general picture of the situation so long as you're beside him."

"That thing relies on... the energy generated by particles banging into another particles."

After hearing that, a certain word came to mind. Saito remembered occasionally seeing this word on television, the newspaper and the internet.

Nuclear submarine.

The core of the submarine is...

"Nuclear!"

"Eh? What's that?"

Uh, a nuclear submarine probably relies on a nuclear reactor to be operational. But since the reactor was as rusty as this place, then it should mean...

The word 'Radiation Leakage' flashed in Saito's mind. Radiation pollution, the Chernobyl incident. Those scary terms appeared all at once.

Saito shouted, "Tiffa! Luctiana! Get out of here now! We can't stay here!"

"Eh? What? What happened?"

"Uh! Basically, the area around here is poisonous."

Tiffania and Luctiana were taken aback by Saito's outburst. He grabbed their hands, wanting to escape this place, but he ended up knocking into an apparatus.

"It hurts! But it's better than being exposed by the radiation!"

"There's no problem, partner." Derflinger said, attempting to calm Saito down.

"What do you mean by no problem?! You have no idea how scary radiation can be!"

"I really have no idea what you mean by radiation, but I'm certain that we'll be fine. Although this boat relies on that power to be operational, but it seems that

there's no fuel stick on the boat."

Saito remembered a news show he watched in Japan about nuclear power. A fuel stick made from uranium is needed for the reactor to work.

"So you mean we won't be exposed to any radiation?"

"Probably."

"But even you can't help but tremble at the things found inside here, right?"

"Yeah."

The interior of the submarine was separated by various walls. They headed further inside, and they passed through the walls. On the way, Saito spotted a gold plate written in Russian.

"This submarine should be from Russia..."

Saito felt more and more uneasy. Once he touched the walls, the rune markings in Saito's left hand glowed even brighter. Unexpectedly, there was still air at the most bottom end. It seemed that the submarine was submerged horizontally downwards, so all the air was collected at the end.

Relying on Luctiana's magic, they managed to open the door with the rust on it falling to the ground like rain in front of them.

Inside was a room that seemed to be a control area of the submarine. Various dash boards, buttons and levers could be seen. In front of the control deck, there were four small, round chairs that looked like the chairs from a coffee shop lined up neatly side by side.

Even though the submarine had lost its power because it was sleeping in the ocean for so long, the cold air was sealed inside this room, maintaining some kind of a tranquil atmosphere.

Saito's rune markings glowed even brighter than before, and started flashing, seemingly in annoyance. The size of the thing that was placed here made him tremble uncontrollably.

Don't tell me...

Saito touched the control deck filled with rust and water droplets. He immediately understood what was contained by the boxes behind the room, how it was used and its power.

Fighter planes and tanks were nothing compared to this. The power that the circular 'guns' stored behind was beyond any power ever seen.

It made one feel that the magic in Halkeginia was only a toy.

Seeing Saito standing there shocked. Tiffania and Luctiana worriedly asked. "Saito, what's wrong? Are you still okay?"

"What's going on?"

What do you call this weapon attached to this submarine? Saito remembered from the news he watched before.

It was an artifact left behind by the Cold War.

The strongest "gun" that humans had created.

Once it exploded, it had enough power to wipe a city clean.

Brimir-san... just what do you want me to do with such a thing?

"It's a nuclear weapon."

Back in the cave after the search mission ended, Saito hid in a corner, bringing both knees to his arms.

This was because of the enormous potential within that thing he found.

...Could I use it as a bargaining chip?

Such thinking almost made his brain explode. The stubborn attitude of the elves, and the firestone which wiped out a dual purpose naval fleet... if I'm unable to take out something as powerful as that, I don't think it's possible that I can

negotiate with them.

On the other hand, Saito felt that he should not be using such a thing as a bargaining chip to negotiate with them. After all, nothing would be left if he were to use it.

But, but...

The situation on his side wasn't optimistic. No matter what, they're going lose their home. For the bigger picture, he should actively use it as a bargaining tool.

But, but, but...

What if the elves reject him, what should he do?

When that time comes, must he really fire that thing?

Saito kept repeating the information received inside his mind, the system to detonate the nuclear missiles. Although it was impossible to fire the missiles from the submarine, after removing a few safety measures put in place, it would be able to explode directly like a bomb.

The rune markings on his left hand told him this method.

He was certain, it was possible to transport the missiles inside the firing barrel, and then directly detonate it. When he thought about that, Saito shook his head, and stared at his hands.

My god, what am I thinking? If I was to do that, I'm the same as that Joseph.

Then what should I do?

Saito sighed.

Luctiana, who was also sitting while hugging both knees, leaning her head on her hands, said.

"Is that strange wasteland that incredible?"

"It's not just incredible. Uh. No..."

"Huh? Then what is it?"

Saito wondered if he should tell Luctiana the truth. After all, it was an incredible bargaining chip, if it were to be taken away by the elves...

Thinking about this, he felt ashamed. Luctiana may be an elf, but she was willing to save him. Although their goals may be different, but she wasn't someone Saito should lie to.

"Very incredible."

"How incredible?"

"It can destroy an entire town... No, not just a town, even the capital would be finished."

"Elf magic can do the same as well~ It's just that we don't see the need to use it."

"Don't you understand? It means that even we have such an option now. If we were to use it, all of us would perish together."

"You plan to use such a scary thing?" Luctiana said, looking straight into Saito's eyes.

"Yeah."

The both stared at each other for a long time. Saito relented.

"I'm just kidding. How can I use such a thing? I think we should just seal it."

Saito crossed both his hands, placing them on his head, before lying down. Although that was what he said on the surface... wasn't there any other way to make the elves surrender the Holy Land?

As expected, do I have to threaten them?

But even so, Saito didn't want to use such a scary thing.

"Honestly..." Saito muttered.

"For me to make such a decision, the responsibility is simply too much for me."

If it was Louise, what would she do?

I think, she should be as hesitant as me. Saito thought.

But to not use the power given to him, and escape reality was weak. Louise probably thought the same as well.

That 'gun'... Is this something that will be forgiven if I were to use it?

Within his heart, a voice said 'Of course not'. Then another voice said 'Now is an emergency, don't hesitate!'

No matter, he still had the responsibility to make a decision. After all, he was the only one who could use that 'gun'.

This reality had changed into an especially heavy burden. Saito couldn't help but mutter one thing.

"Why me?"

On the other hand, Tiffania was worried about a troubled Saito. What he had found on the submarine seemed to be equipped with something very powerful, so powerful that it could fight against the elves magic. But he felt troubled because of this power.

Tiffania wanted to make Saito feel better, but she didn't know what she should do. Thus, she could only pace back and forth.

Tiffania pulled down her loose elven clothing, looking at the pair of melons in front of her chest.

Ah, if he saw these...

The thought of it made Tiffania blush.

"Of course not! What was I thinking..."

Although just now was an emergency, and she had showed him them when he became flustered. However, after thinking about it rationally, she shouldn't be

doing such a thing.

However, Tiffania wanted to make him feel better no matter what. Because each time when she was in trouble, Saito would always reach a hand out.

Then what should I do? When it comes to this, I think only his lover can comfort and encourage him? If only Louise was here, then...

If it was Louise, she would surely make him feel better.

"If only I was Saito's lover...", Tiffania muttered.

That night, when the moon hid inside the clouds, she gently kissed Saito in the darkness. After that, she should have thought that this should be enough, but somehow...

Somehow, she felt that she wasn't like herself anymore.

Tiffania pressed her hands against her chest. Although in the beginning, she had an ambiguous liking towards Saito, but...

Humans are really a species that easily fall in love with another of its kind. That's right, because...

---I feel that, I'm always thinking about Saito.

After that night when they kissed, it had always been like that. Recently, Tiffania felt happy just swimming alongside with Saito.

Once she felt happiness, she wanted things to stay like this forever.

And to think that she wanted things to stay like this forever.

"Despite the situation being so urgent..."

Tiffania hated herself for being so weak. "Now is not the time for me to immerse myself in happiness.", she thought.

She thought of something she could do, and an idea flashed into her mind.

Right!

A familiar!

I haven't summoned a familiar. Maybe if I were to summon a familiar... would I become more useful?

Although Tiffania thought that she would bring her familiar trouble summoning it in such a place, she still thought that this was something she had to do eventually: perhaps her familiar might be the key in solving their current situation.

She had no idea what might appear, but it was better than doing nothing.

Tiffania walked to a corner, and tried to recall the summoning spell she learned in school. This was a spell not commonly used.

Because the incarnation was colloquial in nature, the words of the spell could be freely changed. The teacher mentioned that what was important wasn't the words being said, but the strong desire within one's heart.

The power of magic comes from willpower.

And words were only used to give meaning to that willpower.

There was also another reason in summoning a familiar.

A familiar was brought to a master through the magical strings of fate. This was why Saito and Louise had such a strong bond. Although their personalities were worlds apart, both were aware that they could not live without each other.

If only I had such a person beside me...

Then would the feelings for Saito disappear?

Would it become an invisible bubble, and be absorbed by the vast ocean.

Tiffania took a deep breath, and raised her wand.

"My name is Tiffania Westwood, by the powers governing the five elements..."

She changed her mind, and put down her wand.

Summoning a familiar in such a situation would be too pathetic. Tiffania felt that she wouldn't be able to create a good bond between it and her as well. If that was the case, then there would be no point.

Tiffania was at a loss as she hugged her knees and sat down. Even so, it changed nothing.

After recovering from her daze, she realized that she had been staring at the ring on her right hand. It was a ring from her mother. There was a shining spirit gem on the ring, but only the silver ring setting remained, as she had used the gem to cure Saito's injuries.

Because it was something that her dead mother had left for her, even if only the setting remained, she still wore it. The design of the setting was unique, a net-like pattern that overlapped, layer by layer. Probably an elven style of design.

Every time Tiffania saw this ring, she would always think of her mother. When she was young, her mother was killed by a knight using magic when she jumped to protect Tiffania.

Being a mixed-blood elf, she had no companions, and she was also banned from leaving home, so she only had her mother for company. Her mother often talked about the incidents regarding the desert. There was an oasis, and a huge town... though Tiffania never thought that she would come to this place in such a manner.

Tiffania realized that not all elves were as kind as her mother. She felt heartbroken upon thinking that. Even in the world of the elves, there was nowhere she belonged to.

Would there be a place for her in the human world then? She had a human companion, but, but...

He already had someone in mind, because there was already a girl who had a strong bond with him.

Even if she were to live in the human world, she would still be in pain.

"Somewhere I belong..." Tiffania muttered.

Would those of the same elven kind as her mother... perhaps be someone gentle?

Would there be a place where she truly belonged?

"I really want to meet the elves who are the same kind as my mother...", Tiffania thought.

Chapter 4: Council

Adyl, the capital city of the country of elves. The council meeting room was located at the highest level of the council building.

Just like a mirror, the seats were arranged like a stepladder at either side of the room. At the podium in the anterior of the meeting room, the elven council speaker looked disturbed.

One of the elven council members sitting on the left spoke forcefully, charging another official with misconduct.

"Well then, Sir Bidashal. What do you have to say about this debacle?"

The person who said this with haughty look on his face, was the council member Aishmail.

Only a little younger than Bidashal, his eyes under a short fringe twinkled with a spark, highlighted by the blunder of his political rival.

"Wasn't the person who let the demons run away your niece?"

"That barbarian fanatic!"

A loud murmur of assent echoed around the room immediately.

Bidashal did not move from his seat in the middle of the right side of the room. His face was impassive as usual.

"Well then, fellow peace-loving council members. This is an extremely serious matter to behold! The responsibility for dealing with matters of the 'devil' lies on the shoulders of Sir Bidashal. Not only that, if the person who ran away was his niece, we could not but be suspicious if there is some hidden motive behind all this."

Aishmail said this with an heavy emphasis on the word "we". So, Bidashal raised his head, and asked firmly.

"Who exactly does 'we' refer to?"

Aishmail was speechless for a moment, but a sneer appeared on his face after he took a look around him.

"It refers to my fellow council members here."

"As I was saying, who are those 'fellow council members' you are referring to?"

Aishmail looked around the council room filled by 50-odd council members for help. One of the people who had been murmuring their assent just now kept nodding his head while saying "Yes, yes". A sizable amount of people, lead by Aishmail, raised their hand.

So it was them again, Bidashal felt a pain in his temple. A party of zealots that appeared in the stagnating and decaying country. Narcissistic monsters who hold fast to their beliefs, rejecting any foreign thoughts and approaches.

The "Steed-blooded Party", he spat in his mind as he remembered their name.

However, there was nobody else that stood on their side.

"Sir Aishmail, there doesn't seem be anyone else except you and your friends."

This was ironic in that Bidashal clearly understood that everyone else was not standing on his side either.

Most of the council members present just wanted to end their terms of service without any fuss. They just did not want any trouble during this time. Any mistakes they made while sitting here as a clan representative would directly bring misfortune to their own clan. As such, they would avoid any action that would require them to bear any sort of responsibility.

This was the reality behind the Council that boasted millenniums of history. They weren't really in a position to ridicule barbarians, thought Bidashal.

"Everyone here wants somebody else to make the decision."

He thought of his niece's face. She was very similar to his younger self, he mumbled to himself. The reason behind her interest of the barbarians, was the desire for some sort of "change".

With no improvements, there would be no surprises.

Somewhere in his heart, he was unable to forgive his peers who only wished to live the same kind of life every day.

Bidashal said firmly,

"Even so, yes, it's exactly as Sir Aishmail has said. As the Chairman of the Barbarian Countermeasures Committee, I do bear the responsibility of managing the barbarians within the vicinity of our borders, and the responsibility for supervising my niece, Luctiana, is also on my shoulders. Furthermore, the one who educated her was me. Any blame to be made, can only be directed to me."

Aishmail revealed a malevolent smile, as if he saw a weakened prey.

"This doesn't seem right. No matter how I see it, this is a serious matter of ethnic rebellion."

"Isn't it the job of the judiciary to determine that?"

"No, no, no, don't you know where your niece has ran off to? After what she did, not even the crime of ethnic rebellion would be enough to please the masses. If our society was still the society of the past... if this were the era where our society was without order, this would be a serious crime that would cause the beheading of every clan member."

Because of Aishmail's statement, the council member began a commotion.

"It can't be... is this true?"

"Yes, it is, fellow council members. Behold, the report from the navy."

Aishmail retrieved a document from the bag beside him. The council members beside him read it, and their eyes turned wide.

"What is this! Bringing the devil! To the 'dragon's nest'!"

The council meeting room erupted into an uproar.

"We have to send our troops at once..."

"Ah! However, even if we kill the devil, wouldn't he just be revived again?"

"But, if the devil were to reach the 'dragon's nest', we don't know what would happen!"

Every council member in the room directed their gaze to Bidashal, whose face remain impassive among the chaos.

"So, could we all come to the mutual understanding that the crime committed by his niece, is not just some petty crime?"

Aishmail gloated at Bidashal with the glowing face of a victor.

"Well then, since it has escalated to an incident of such degree, we could not just dismiss it as whimsical urges of a young woman who's strange in the head. Sir Bidashal, could you have known about this all along, and taught her about it too?"

"You cannot act as if you didn't hear anything. What exactly is happening here?"

Azar urged his master to speak.

"Put in another way, Sir Bidashal has been working with the barbarians, to seize the 'Sahara' [1] as his own."

"Which remind me, didn't he once serve under a barbarian king!"

Some of the council members groaned. Bidashal only said that he had nothing to say while shaking his head.

"In any case, their clan is too dangerous! I hereby propose that their clan be exiled!"

"I have no objection to that!"

Aishmail yelled out. His party members did the same.

The rest of the council members looked at each other while thinking, "What to do?". They just sat there looking useless. So this is what happens to people who hate "change", thought Bidashal.

In this sense, Aishmail who was shouting feverishly was much better. Even though he was a fanatic perpetuating the idea of terrorism, it was still a decision made and executed on his own. However, his party's ideology would never be accepted.

Bidashal felt tired and uneasy.

"Well then, if me and my clansmen were to resign from our posts, will that satisfy you?"

As Bidashal surrendered so simply, Aishmail looked dumbfounded.

"It's, it's not just about satisfying me. The council members present here..."

At this time, an old elf appeared in the council meeting room. The council speaker, who had been silent the whole time, said,

"You are late," with a depressed voice. The old elf stuck out his tongue, and scratched his head.

Everyone displayed a shocked expression.

"Isn't that what barbarians do?"

The old elf looked unfazed, and said firmly,

"I learnt it from Sir Bidashal's niece. She really knows her stuff when it comes to barbarians."

After that, the old elf looked around, and said,

"Fellow council members, your arguments have been duly noted. However, in this old man's opinion, I will veto the council's verdict of dismissing Sir Bidashal from his post."

"This is dictatorship!"

Aishmail shouted out.

"This is the right given to the president by law."

With a mischievous smile on his face, the current president of Nephthys, Turuk, said firmly,

"Well then, fellow wise council members. Even though you are all calling for Sir Bidashal's resignation, is there anyone more knowledgeable about the realm of barbarians than him?"

Every one in the room went quiet.

"This man, has not only fought against the barbarians, but has also served under a barbarian king. We cannot win a war against them without understanding our enemies. If there is anyone who can deal with the barbarians better than him, I urge the person to step forth."

This made Aishmail and his party shut their mouth. Bidashal looked a little embarrassed, and closed his eyes. Looking right at Bidashal, Turuk continued to say,

"Alright, that's it then. Sir Bidashal. Please continue working hard from now on too."

Even though Aishmail kept his silence, he still slowly stood up.

"Alright then. However, the 'dragon's nest' is still under the jurisdiction of the navy."

"The navy whom you have good connections with?"

"Of course. My clan and 'the party' grew in power together."

"So?"

"Sir Bidashal, please just continue your efforts in barbarian 'countermeasures'. Let me deal the crisis before us, with real power."

After the meeting, Ari, equipped in full battle armor, ran to the side of Bidashal,

who just exited the meeting room.

He walked alongside Bidashal to the outside, all the while mindful of the people around him. This was because Bidashal refused to talk.

"So what was the result?" Ari pressed on.

"I'll resume my post as the Chairman of the Barbarian Countermeasures Committee."

Ari instantly breathed a sigh of relief, but his face soon scrunched up in anxiety.

"What about your niece?"

"Your fiancée has committed a crime of ethnic rebellion. This has now become a fact."

"Isn't there anything we can do?"

Ari's face went devoid of expression. The crime of ethnic rebellion was punishable by death.

"The problem is where she had escaped to. This is no longer excusable."

"Didn't that girl know nothing about it? How, then, did she go to the 'dragon's nest'..."

"Even if she didn't know where it was, she shouldn't even go there. Even you know that, don't you?"

"Aren't you a little too calm? Your niece is going to die!"

"Hey, she's your fiancée."

The two of them walked side by side all the while.

"Seriously! If they had known about the escape, shouldn't they have caught them then and there? And yet, they just let them slip right past..."

On that day... Even though he had thought that the Council Guard Troops he was in were the only ones going after Luctiana and company, in reality that was not

the case. It seemed like the Navy also was on the lookout for them.

"They seem eager to know what's happening behind the scenes."

Bidashal sighed and said.

"What does that mean?"

"They didn't think that Luctiana acted alone. That's it."

"In other words, they want to do you in, right?"

"Right."

Ari looked genuinely shocked.

"Why is that so? Even at this time, when the 'Great Calamity' is before us, we're fighting between the clans..."

"This is reality. Our reality."

"No matter what, that's what we are facing now. Your niece..."

"Hey, she's your fiancée."

"By the way, how about the navy? Those loyal dogs, under Sir Aishmail."

Ari said this with a sarcastic tone. The fact that the navy had already become a private army of the party lead by Aishmail ... the "Steel-blooded Party" was already an open secret.

"It goes without saying that, our fellow beloved 'Steel-blooded Party' comrades will capture the devil and 'traitor' at the 'dragon's nest', to protect our national pride."

"Capture?"

"That was the Council's order just now. However, they will, without doubt, act under an 'expanded interpretation' of the order."

"That's what they are best at."

"Exactly so."

Ari sighed again.

"After capturing the 'devil', we will lock him up and keep him alive. This is the viewpoint of the Turuk and the conservatives like you. However, the 'Steel-blooded Party' led by Aishmail..."

"Fanatics who will stop at nothing to kill off all the devils."

"It doesn't matter if they can be revived, they will kill them each time they live. No matter how many they are, no matter how they do it, they will kill the devils.

They will also kill every traitor... every enemy of the people of the desert. And then we, the people of the desert, will use this opportunity to kill the devils... If they were to act on this, the 'dragon's nest' will be tainted with blood."

"It does make some sense though. One way or another, don't think too much and just do it."

"Well then," Having said this, Ari took a look at Bidashal. He no longer looked tired, and instead had a serious look on his face.

"What should I do?"

Bidashal stopped in his tracks.

"Do you love Luctiana?"

He asked.

Ari gazed at a distance and answered,

"If I were to be able to say 'yes' here, wouldn't that be cool?"

"You can say that."

"To be honest, my thoughts aren't really so organized now, I don't know. It's just that, there are many things I would have liked to tell her, and if she were to die before I could tell them to her, my anger would have nowhere to go, I don't even know what will happen then."

Maybe, he was itching to rush all the way to the 'dragon's nest'. He equipped his entire set of battle armor just for that. If he could reach her before the navy... However, he had not thought about what should he do after he had saved her, naturally.

Bidashal laughed.

"Alright then, this is a gift for a knight like you."

He took out a document from his pocket, and handed it over to Ari.

"What is this?"

"As you can see, this is an introduction letter. It's someone I know from the barbarian country I was in... Gallia, when I had been working there."

Ari's eyes opened wide. He looked like he was going to shout out something, but he stopped himself. He looked around and lowered his voice.

"...Do you want us to escape?"

"Yes."

"To a barbarian country!"

"Only until this incident is over."

"And when would that be!"

"I don't really know. Anyway, I'll leave my niece under your care, my dear knight."

After watching Ari leave, Bidashal walked towards Turuk's office. Without even knocking, Bidashal entered the room of the highest authority in Nephthys. Inside it, Turuk was alone sitting on his chair flipping pages a book.

"Has it been done?"

"Yes."

"'Insurance' is always needed no matter what we do."

"That's the best we could do. But this would be tough even for Aishmail."

"He's a hardworking man, eh? Even though I will never accept his ideas."

"If I were thirty years younger, I might have been captivated by his words..."

"Old man me has decided from a long time ago, that the only thing that would captivate me is alcohol."

Turuk took out a bottle of beer from the drawer, poured a cup, and gestured Bidashal to come forward. Bidashal took the glass and drank it in one gulp.

"Alright then, Mr. President. You should be telling me the real reason now."

"What do you mean by the real reason?"

"Seriously. I'm asking you to stop acting dumb. Why the heck did you send me to the barbarians? Why are you going so far to prevent the direct confrontation with the devils?"

"Because of cowardice. Old man me hates wars, you know."

"I know this. I also don't like meaningless wars. However, it's hard to suppress people like Aishmail who are clamoring for war every time. Their party membership has been expanding, bit by bit. At the same time, they have also been spreading their ideas to other clans. 'Us elves won't lose to the barbarians in a war. And yet, why wouldn't the president just declare war against them?', that's what they are saying right now."

At the same time, Turuk began scratching his ears. It was his habit when he was thinking about something.

"Don't you also know the true colors of the 'dragon's nest'?"

"Yes."

A portion of the Nephthys council members, have been told of the real nature of the 'dragon's nest'. But this secret has been fiercely guarded and was never released to the public.

"And about the occasional findings of broken junk around that place?"

"Yes. Guns and swords. Rifles and something like cannons. Barbarian weapons, all of them. Sometimes barbarians will send their spies, and bring them back..."

"Until a few decades ago, those are indeed junk. So we didn't give much thought about it. If we were to be too vigilant and provoke the barbarians, that wouldn't be good."

"What's that supposed to mean."

Bidashal's eyes glowed.

"In a few decades, these 'weapons' have become frighteningly advanced."

"This is the first time I've heard this."

"Yeah. Everyone just thinks that those things are broken junk."

Turuk took out something from the drawer.

"This is something that was discovered recently."

Bidashal took the thing that had a black sheen. It was a handgun. However, it was different than the elven ones and the ones in Halkeginia. That was clear at a glance. The technology involved is of an entirely different level.

"This gun, if you were to pull the trigger, can fire consecutive shots. Using the pressurized heated gas produced as it fires."

"This is really well made. However, if it's just this, we couldn't be scared of..."

"It's not only this. We've also found larger, complex machines. We don't even know how use them, nor do we even understand what were they made for."

Bidashal thought of the barbarian young man he met in the barbarian country who had also been brought here. Which brings to mind that, he used strange magical weapons to obtain victory countless times in the wars between the 'devils'...He defeated a troop of dragon knights all on his own, stalled an army of thousands, and even skillfully destroyed the 'Jormungand' he made.

Even though he thought that those were all the work of the devil's "magical weapons"...

"These 'weapons' have no magic applied on them. Do you understand what does this mean?"

"We're not afraid of any magic the barbarians can use, but as for this..."

"Exactly. This 'technology' is daunting. No matter how you put it, everyone can use technology. Are you sure that we would win against an army armed with these 'weapons' and the 'work of the devil' [3]?"

"If you put it that way... I don't really know."

Bidashal gave his honest opinion.

"Killing off all the devils, huh. Ah, they're really all worked up, aren't they... But what I fear is that we will be the ones who are all killed off."

"However, their armies doesn't seem to be equipped with these sort of sophisticated 'weapons'."

"Of course. This was because, these weapons aren't made by them."

"Then who were the ones who made it?"

"The 'dragon's nest'... Ah, don't get all fidgety. It's okay to tell you here since there isn't anyone else except old man me and you."

Bidashal swallowed his saliva. Nervousness encapsulated him.

"It's the humans on the other side of 'Shaitan's door'."

It had been taboo to even mention this. In the past, when the humans from 'the other side'... The "devils" came to this land... the 'Great Calamity' happened.

"Mr Bidashal. What I'm worried of, is not the barbarians of the west."

"...So, we cannot let 'Shaitan's door' to be reopened."

This time, Turuk shook his head.

"Since it has come to this, it's not a stretch to say that this is too hard of a task. We couldn't even unite ourselves. Even if we were the one who created such a country."

Bidashal was reminded to Aishmail's face.

"Alright, let's not digress. The barbarians in the western lands... those people are losing their homeland. We must know what they are up to. Their real intentions."

"So that's what 'working hard' back at the meeting room was about."

"Yes. It's a task that could be entrusted to you."

Bidashal thought of Ari's face when he left. It seems they would meet again not long from now, Bidashal thought.

The navy headquarters of Adyl was located about 10 minutes away from the huge tower in the middle of the bustling city, 'Kasper', if one were to go through the waterways.

Numerous triangular flags swayed with the wind atop the building with white walls. The blue and yellow flags at the apex was the symbol of the navy headquarters. Blue for the sea and yellow for the desert. Representing the domination they had over the two realms, the two flags were unique to the elven navy.

Navy "warships" aligned along the harbor. These "warships", if they were to be seen by the Halkeginians, would not be what they were expecting.

In fact, they weren't ships at all.

At a length of a hundred Mails, they were dragons reminiscent of large whales... called "dragon whales". If one was to strip them of their iridescent blue scales, they would look like just any other whale.

They lined up tamely at the harbor, leaving only their spine out of the water surface. The elves were masters in the skill of domestication.

The harbor behind them was created through magical stone masonry. The white structure was a derivative design of ancient elf cities. The Nydus Navy... an

organization colorfully tinted with elven tradition.

On the navy harbor, an elven girl was supervising the task of 'refueling' with serious eyes.

She had beautiful lustrous blond hair and crystalline jade green eyes, tilted downwards at the ends. She looked like an goddess standing there. However, a frosty glare took hold of her pearly eyes. Her expression was as cold as ice.

Wearing a fitting uniform, she was the ideal leader, a woman of the desert trained by the "Steel-blooded Party".

Marines glanced at her fearfully as they refueled the warship. However, because the warship in question was a living organism, the fuel naturally was 'food'.

A few elves carried fish, loaded in large barrels up a tall stepped stool, and poured the fish into the dragon whale's open mouth.

The stool was wheeled, so it took skill to carry the heavy barrels up the stool without it flipping over. They did not use magic for this. For the navy, they were trained under the belief that "magic was something to be used in battle, not just for any trivial matter."

One of the marines got nervous and made a mistake as he was operating the stepped stool, knocking over the barrel. Fresh fish, reared from the fisheries nearby, flailed vigorously on the harbor.

The girl lifted her eyes immediately.

"What the heck are you doing?"

"Ah, s-sorry!"

The marine, lowered his head immediately.

The girl officer strutted towards him. Placing her hands on her waist, she raised her head to look at the marine who was a head taller than her.

"This happened because you were lax! If you even had an ounce of pride in you as the people of the desert, you wouldn't have made such a trivial mistake!"

"I'll be careful in the future!"

"What happens if we lost to the barbarians because of your mistake? Mistakes in the battlefield cost lives."

At this time, one of the marines beside them chuckled lightly under his breath. He was a veteran marine.

"Is there anything funny about this?"

"No, there isn't. Major Fatima Hadat."

"If you don't say it, I'll treat it as an act of disrespect towards a superior and punish you accordingly right here."

Fatimah placed her hand on the saber by her waist. The marine remembered that she was a member of the "Steel-blooded Party". Knowing that she was not bluffing about it, he spoke reluctantly.

"No...I just thought that, the major did not have any real battlefield experience."

"Then have you been on the battlefield before, private?"

"Even if I don't look like it, I have been in the navy for fifty years. I had some experience in fighting barbarian pirates."

Fatima said coldly,

"I have my elven pride, and have therefore received adequate training. Those will be enough to supplant experience on the battlefield."

She looked like she had absolute faith in her words. Even though the marine wanted to say something about it, he was stopped by his peers. Just then, an out-of-breath messenger came running, and called for Fatima.

"Major Fatima Hadat!"

"What is it?"

"Sir Aishmail called for you."

Fatimah's facial expression glowed, and just like that, she ran back with the messenger. The marines sighed as they watched her leave.

"The navy of the past had lesser communication problems like this..."

"After those people rose to power, don't you feel that everything has turned strange somehow."

The place Fatima went to was the command center. There, she found Aishmail looking outside the window.

"I apologize for keeping you waiting, Comrade Council Member Aishmail."

Fatima did not use the traditional navy salute and instead placed her palm on her chest, and gave the party salutary bow to Aishmail. He turned to meet her, a smile on his face.

"There is a mission I have for you, Comrade Major."



"Please command me as you wish."

"Please capture the devil's offspring who has escaped to the 'dragon's nest', and the traitor that has escaped with them."

Fatima flushed pink.

"This is a great honor for me! To hand such an important responsibility to us..."

"There are people who doubt where your loyalties lie."

Fatima's face instantly distorted in anger.

"My aunt has shamed my clan. But, I'm completely different from her. I..."

"I already know all that. Your talent and loyalty to the party is uncontested. I personally gave you this opportunity for your clan to redeem yourselves."

"Thank you very much!"

"Well then, the order that the council gave to the navy is to, 'Immediately go to the dragon's nest, and capture the devil and traitor'... However, for someone with the pride and awareness of the people of the desert like you, you should understand what I want to say."

"Yes."

Fatima gave a firm nod.

"I will give the both of them the gift of death."

"You're completely correct. We, the people of the desert, as united as steel, will continue to exterminate the devil. We will kill them every time they revive, no matter how many times that will be. This is the meaning of the 'Noble Will'."

"However... I'm afraid that I lack enough firepower to complete the task if I were to only mobilize my troops."

"Your troops are the commando troops, right?"

"Yes."

"You can use a fleet to handle logistics and support your troops."

"But I'm only ranked as a major."

"Then, you've been promoted. From now onwards you're a colonel. Also, you're in charge of commanding this operation."

"However, the fleet commander is still ranked above me."

"Have you forgotten? In the navy, the party rank takes precedence over the military rank."

Chapter 5: An Elf's Longing

"You looked troubled. A penny for your thoughts?" Mother Sea asked, on the day after Saito found the submarine. It was rare for her to do that.

Saito looked disturbed the whole time that day. It could also be said that he was depressed because of the "nuclear weapon".

"Um, you see... Actually, I'm the legendary familiar."

"Ah, I see."

"I have the power to use any weapon."

"That sounds nice."

Mother Sea said this with a monotonous voice.

"Hey, can't you put a little more effort in hearing me out?"

"I'm listening. It's just that I've have lived for so long. I wouldn't feel surprised about listening to something that ordinary."

After hearing the ancient dragon say something like that, Saito started to feel as if his troubles were nothing more than a drop of water in the sea.

"Well, the ancestor of my master has sent me 'weapons'. Using some unknown magic, they sent me weapons from my world."

"So, you're troubled by the weapon you've found."

"Yeah."

"No matter what, that weapon was sent to you, right? Shouldn't you be happy about it?"

"The problem, is the power of said weapon. Even in my world, that is the most powerful weapon available to us. It's the ultimate weapon, used only as a desperate measure. This is not just some weapon comparable to something like the gun."

"Oh, then what is it really?"

"It's a nuclear submarine. It's sunk at a place 10 minutes from here if I ride a dolphin."

"Oh, that one? The chunk of steel as big as a building was built by you guys?"

"You know about it?"

"Of course. There's nothing in this ocean that old me doesn't know about. I see, so that thing was a weapon from your world."

That thing? Saito took special note of this phrase.

"Are there others?"

"Yeah. Do you want to take a look?"

"Take a look? Did you mean..."

"Old me thought that they were junk, so I gathered them into one place. I've never thought that they were weapons."

Mother Sea pointed towards the deep end of the cave. There was another hole in there, filled with seawater, with a diameter of about 20 Mails.

"They are inside there."

"In the water?"

"No, there's another place similar to here through that hole. I'll bring you there. Hop on my back."

Saito suddenly felt uneasy but he did not know why. He followed Mother Sea's instructions and climbed onto her back.

"Saito, where are you going?"

After Saito sat atop Mother Sea, Tiffania, who has been sleeping beside Saito the whole time, woke up.

"It seems like there are more of those weapons."

"I will go with you."

Tiffania immediately got up.

Luctiana, who had been playing with the dolphins at one side, saw what they were doing and walked to them.

"Where are you guys going?"

"Oh, Mother Sea told me that there were more weapons from my world here."

"Eh, what are those? I also want to take a look. By the way, why haven't you told me about it before?" Luctiana said to Mother Sea, surprised.

"I've always thought that those were junk thrown away by you elves or the humans..."

"Hey, it's not like us to litter."

Luctiana grabbed onto Mother Sea's scales and climbed onto its back with a sour face.

"Alright, bring us there. Quickly."

Tiffania followed Luctiana's lead and climbed up the back of Mother Sea. After making sure that everyone sat on her back, Mother Sea began to lumber forward into the hole filled with sea water.

The hole seemed to lead to a labyrinth of tunnels, like an anthill, within the gradually expanding hollow interior of the stone mountain.

After diving in the water for about ten seconds, they resurfaced into another cave.

Seawater gushed into the cave. As it was connected to the outside, the interior of the cave was relatively bright. It reminded Saito of the famous stalactite caves he had seen on the inland travel agendas in the magazines or in the television programs before.

However, the place that Mother Sea brought them to lacked the sense of mysticism.

This was because it was filled to the brim with corporeal objects.

Saito took in a deep breath.

All kinds of weapons lay before him.

Rifles, cannons, tanks...there was even a fighter jet...

He thought of the underground basement Julio brought him to. Even though there were also weapons of all sizes there, it was incomparable to this place in terms of quantity.

However, this might be because all of these were found in the sea. Most of the objects were husks of their former selves, rusted beyond repair, and had become completely unusable. What the Romalians had found were probably found on land.

Saito touched the surface of a tank of unknown origin, which had turned craggy due to rust.

As the smell of corroded iron entered Saito's nostrils, he was overwhelmed by a sudden sense of homesickness and sorrow. These military weapons, brought away from home to a faraway land before they could be used, left to decay here as time went on...

However, in a way, this might also be a form of bliss.

To be able to end their lives without causing pain and suffering to others, might be a path to happiness after all...

Saito superimposed himself over those weapons. He thought about how he himself, was a weapon that had been summoned to this world...

However, he was not a "tool". He was sentient, and he had a soul. What should he do, after being gifted such destructive power?

Wasn't it for the best if he allowed his life to be wasted away like the weapons here? Saito could not help himself from thinking that way.

Just as Saito was drowned in his morose thoughts, Tiffania gently grasped his hand. Saito turned his head, and saw Tiffania shook her head while looking at Saito with a serious face.

Her eyes carried a strength that made Saito felt remorseful at thinking about how he should waste his life away here.

"You shouldn't be worrying about unnecessary things, you know."

Tiffania said that with a gentle voice.

"Sorry, I think too much."

"What is the matter?"

"It's nothing. I was thinking, isn't the weapons piled up here the same as me?"

Tiffania shook her head after hearing Saito speak.

"Saito isn't a tool. You're not a person. You're not just any person..."

Having said this, Tiffania lowered her face, embarrassed.

"You're also an important friend to me, aren't you?"

"I guess you're right. Thank you."

Knowing how Tiffania thought about him made Saito feel happy, and a smile appeared on his face.

Saito cheered himself up and walked up to the pile of weapon husks, planning to scour around looking for something that could be used. Even though he did not know what would happen after this, weapons were always needed.

Tiffania followed Saito's lead and began searching the pile. Meanwhile Luctiana

simply looked at them from the side.

"Aren't you going to help them?"

Mother Sea asked Luctiana, but she simply shook her head.

"They are our enemies, you know. They're are finding weapons to kill us, how could I help them do that?"

"Didn't you help them escape?"

"That's because I didn't like how the Council did things."

"Do things the way they should have been done. You people have such a complicated way of living," said Mother Sea. However, after observing that Luctiana was in fact itching to join them, Mother Sea then said,

"You want to join them, don't you? It's written all over your face."

"That's because I am interested in what they are doing. Even if that's the case. Alright! I'm just going to take a look!"

Having said that, Luctiana joined the duo who had been searching the "weapons".

Although most of them had rusted beyond repair and left only husks of their original selves, they managed to find some weapons that were borderline usable. They were mostly small caliber firearms covered in plastic, or stainless steel revolvers that had been given the waterproof treatment.

What were they planning to do with all of these stuff? There were even some Russian-made rocket launchers in there. They got a shock when they found a plastic bag containing a hand grenade and a smoke bomb, along with something like a plastic bullet cartridge. Saito did not know that there were so many weapons that had been waterproofed.

What's even surprising was that there was a boat here.

Not only that, it was not an ancient artifact like the Zero Fighter or the Tiger Tank. It seemed to be built just a few years ago, still maintaining its outer

appearance, floating at the end of the cave that was closer to the sea.

The boat was ten mails long, and at a glance, was no different than an ordinary boat. However, there were machine guns build into the bow of the boat. So it was not any ordinary boat at all. It may have been one of the patrol boats that guarded a port.

"This was found just recently."

Mother Sea looked unusually lively. It seems that she enjoys collecting these items.

They did not have to guess where the boat came from, as the characters, "U•S•NAVY", were painted with black paint on its hull. Even though the dull gray body of the boat had begun to rust, it still seemed to be in operating condition. Saito clambered up the boat, and placed his palm on the wall of the boat. As expected, the runes on the back of his hand began to shine.

"This can still be used."

Saito mumbled to himself as he walked towards the cockpit. If it was something provided by Mr. Brimir, then this should be a military boat, but he also felt that the atmosphere within the boat was not that severe. From the outside it just looked like a normal boat floating on the water.

Saito grabbed the steering wheel just as he would to that of a car's. At the same time, the blueprint designs, operating instructions, and other information of the boat began streaming into his brain. This boat seemed to be propelled by an internal combustion engine and a water jet propulsion system. It also seemed to be the latest model, so it would not be that much of a hassle to run it, as compared to the Zero Fighter and Tiger Tank. Machines have evolved so much since the old days, eh?, Saito thought.

He looked at the fuel tank indicator. There was plenty of fuel left.

Saito turned on the motors and fired up the engines. The boat looked delicate, but as expected of a military boat, it was very durable and still worked even after it had not been maintained for a period of time.

Mother Sea jolted upright, shocked by the sound of the starting boat engines.

"What is it? What's happening!"

"That's the sound of engines revving up."

Saito did not notice that Luctiana and Tiffania had already climbed into the boat, and was looking around curiously. As Luctiana had a scornful look on her face, Saito felt pride welling up inside of him.

"What do you think of the patrol boat, elf lady?"

"Mm, what are you asking me that for? Oh right, what magic produced the sound just now?"

"That's not magic, you know. That's science. It's produced by something called an engine. I know you guys have pretty advanced technology, but could you guys make something like this?"

"Don't say it like that. It gets on my nerves."

Luctiana said glumly. But she then turned back with a serious expression and said,

"Hey, make it move for me."

"What's that 'hey' about, blockhead. Change your tone!"

"What! You barbarian!"

The two of them began to squabble. Tiffania looked at them, at a loss of what to do.

"Alright, alright, stop it, the both of you! By the way, Saito, this looks impressive. How do you operate it?"

Saito taught Tiffania how to operate the boat. Even though that seemed quite the daunting task, most of the operations are automatic, so it was very simple. It was just like driving a car.

Even though he wanted to take the boat out for a test run, he did not want to attract unwanted attention. So he decided against it.

Looking at Saito's and Tiffania's happy faces made Luctiana bored so she pouted and said, "Humph, someone's on a high horse. Science? What about it, huh? In the end there was only this thing that was of any use. The rest was all rubbish."

"What? Don't you see that this is not the only one! Every one of these guns and rocket launchers are also made by science! There are so many of them!"

"Even us elves could make them, if that is the case!"

"Show me then! Where are they!"

However, Luctiana started looking away and whistling.

"This irritating girl..."

Just then, Saito noticed about something.

Why did so many weapons from Earth appear in the sea here?

Saito thought about something Julio had said some time ago, in the underground basement,

"These 'weapons' were found near the Holy Lands..."

Linking this statement with the fact that there is a huge pile of weapons here...

Right.

This was a place where even a nuclear submarine got moved to.

He had always thought that the 'Holy Land' was located on land because there was the word 'land' in it... However, six thousand years had passed, so the terrain may have changed over time. In other words, what might have been land, may also become the sea.

In that case, could this place actually be the 'Holy Land'?

Or would it be some place close to here...

Saito stopped that train of thought for a while. No, how can this be possible? This was impossible. However...

Saito could not get rid of the lingering idea that this was "possible".

"Hey, Derf."

"What?" Derflinger, who had been hanging on Saito's waist lazily, spoke up.

"Didn't you say before, that the place where the Holy Land was has changed, so you didn't know where was it."

"Mm, yes, I did say that."

"Um... Mother Sea?"

"What is it?"

"Was the place around here previously land?"

"This place has always been sea since I was born here."

"How long ago was that?"

"Around a thousand years ago, I think."

"How was it like before that?"

"Oh, now that you've mentioned it, my grandmother did mentioned something about it. When the grandmother of my grandmother was around, this place was once land..."

Saito felt that his assumption was no longer just a simple hunch.

Luctiana said, surprised, "How is that possible? Are you saying that this place is 'Shaitan's Door'? Hey, this is the 'dragon's nest', an abandoned place, forgotten by everyone. If this place was 'Shaitan's Door', the army should have been stationed here to guard it. We couldn't have entered this place that easily..."

"If the army were to do that, wouldn't that just be like telling everyone, 'Hey, Shaitan's Door is here'?"

"However, even if that were so, then once they knew that we were here, how could we be so calm and carefree..."

"That's why I feel that it's too strange for us to be able to escape so easily!"

Just then, a loud explosion echoed from a distance.

What happened? Just as they were looking at each other in confusion, the outer walls of the massive stone pillar that Mother Sea lived in reverberated with the sound of something hard crashing into it. The cave shook violently, just like in an earthquake.

Saito immediately understood what made the sound. It was the same explosion sounds he had heard before in Albion and Gallia.

Cannons.

Another volley confirmed Saito's suspicions.

"This is bad...!"

If only he could have known this sooner... He should have put two and two together when he found the submarine.

"Ah, what's happening? What is it?" Luctiana asked around anxiously. Tiffania hung onto Saito, scared.

"It seems that our fates are in their hands." Saito said apprehensively.

"Only three hit their marks. Isn't that a little inaccurate, Comrade Fleet Commander?" Fatima commented after she saw the landing points as she stood on the bridge of her ship. She stood firm, her posture reminiscent of the mythical female warriors of Halkeginia.

The warship fleet she commanded had four 'dragon whales' in total. Each warship had a rotating cannon tower installed on the bridge.

The base of the cannon tower had been transformed from a dragon whale's fin. This meant that the sturdy cannon tower could be rotated without any sort of magic power.

The rear mounted cannons on each tower were extremely powerful weapons. This was because each cannon barrel, which had been invented about fifty years

ago, were rifled.

With the ability to induce a stabilizing spin to the acorn shaped artillery shells, which greatly improved the range and power of the cannons, these cannons had brought countless victories to the Elven navy in their battles against Halkeginias pirates and navy.

Even though the navy and air force warships of Halkeginia also carried hundreds of cannons of their own, each one of those cannons were older front mounted ones. Halkeginians also had the rifling technology, but due to the lack of metallurgical knowledge, and the opposition from the nobles against civilian arms, this technology was not well-received. The regression of technical knowledge was just like the nobles who thought that magic was the only orthodox technology and that weapons were the path to evil.

"It's just like that, Comrade Colonel. Three out of eight hit their mark. It's pretty good."

The fleet commander said that while he surveyed the situation with his telescope. They have just launched the cannons, two from each of the four 'dragon whale' warships, all at once.

"Alright, what should we do now then?"

For the fleet commander's question, Fatima answered, "Our orders by the Council were to 'capture them alive'."

"No, I'm asking what our orders from the Party were."

The fleet commander was also one of the members of 'Steel-blooded Party'.

"We, the people of the desert, as united as steel by our bond of blood, will exterminate the barbarians of the west. Oh Noble Will, lead our way!" Fatima answered with the party constitution.

The fleet commander nodded, satisfied, and gave his order.

"Continue the shelling. All cannons, fire at will. Shoot everything we have against them. We'll tell them whose land is it here."

The shelling continued without pause.

"Wait a minute! Why are they suddenly throwing cannon shells at us?"

A few shells hit the rock ceiling, causing rock shards to rain down. One of the stone pillars beside them got hit. Spear-like stalactites fell right in front of Saito and the others and shattered into pieces.

"Anyway, let's get out of here first."

Saito took off his shirt immediately and jumped into the sea. Tiffania and Luctiana also stripped down to their underwear and dived into the water after him.

After riding the dolphins out of the cave, they heard cannon shots behind them.

"It's that way."

Saito and the others dived into the water and swam to the other side. They then lay on the dolphins, leaving only their heads out of the water to look at their surroundings.

Ah, found them!

There were four ships, barely touching the water's surface, firing their cannons on the sea a few kilometers away.

"It's the cannon ships from the navy!"

"Those are cannon ships?"

The whale-like organisms, that were carrying a cannon tower and a ship bridge, were actually warships of the Elven navy. Saito was surprised by this.

"Yeah! Hey! Why are they shooting when I'm still inside!"

"That's because you're a traitor. No matter what, even if we died, it's not us who's going to be bothered, right?"

After hearing Saito say that, Luctiana nodded.

"I guess. Although I won't like that to happen."

Just then, cannon shells flew towards them. One of them hit the water not far away from Saito, and the waves after the initial pillar of water crashed into them.

"Uwah!"

As Luctiana was prepared to howl out in indignity, Saito grabbed her leg and pulled her into the water.

"Gulp! What are you doing!"

"They'll notice us, you idiot!"

"I can't put up with this if I don't say something!"

"Anyway, we should focus on escaping first!"

After returning to the cave, Saito and the others prepared to flee the place. However, they did not have any luggage to speak of.

"Where are we going to escape to?"

Luctiana asked Saito.

"How would I know? I'll leave that to you."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Saito let Tiffa and Luctiana sit in the dolphin boat, while he took the small patrol boat. He grabbed some of the weapons they had found just now with him in the boat.

"What? Are you going to run away in that boat alone?"

"Of course not! I'm going distract them. Wait a few minutes, then you guys leave in the opposite direction."

"I-I want to go with you!" Tiffania anxiously prepared to board the small patrol boat. However, Saito shook his head.

"No, Tiffania. You have to leave on that boat."

"I can't allow you to be bait while I run away!"

Tiffania grasped Saito's hand tearfully. Saito looked away and shook his head again.

"No."

"Please!"

"If I'm alone, it's much easier for me to move around. I'll just lure them away then I'll join you guys."

"I can also do something!"

Tiffania did not plan to give up. Another shell hit the ceiling, and rock shards rained down from the ceiling again.

"As I was saying! Tiffa! This is too dangerous for you!"

"I don't care if it's dangerous. Even if it's me, there will be things that I can do. Just tell me how to use those 'weapons'!"

Saito put on a serious expression. To be honest, he did not want to say the things he was going to say. However, there was no time for them to delay any longer. Tiffania was unable to make any calm decisions anymore.

Saito said with a bitter voice, "You are a burden to me."

"What?"

"I'll just speak my mind then. You're going to be a burden to me. If you don't escape, it will only create more problems for me."

Me? A burden? Tiffania was dumbfounded. Saito used the opportunity to push her down the patrol boat.

"Luctiana, I'll leave Tiffa to you." Having said that, Saito started the engines of the small patrol boat. The motors whirled into life, and the boat began to move.

"Oi! Dolphins! Turn them around!"

Saito shouted towards the dolphins that had gathered around the boat. The dolphins immediately understood what Saito meant, and deftly turned the boat around with their noses.

After Saito made sure that Luctiana had pulled Tiffania onto the boat, he putting his palms together and said, "Sorry," softly.

Saito stepped on the propeller gas pedal after confirming that the path forward is cleared, slowly moving the small patrol boat out to the open.

After he exited the cave, Saito turned on the pump jets to maximum throttle.

Under the double acceleration of the propellers and pump jets, the small patrol boat began to move forward rapidly.

"Partner, you said some horrible things, eh."

"That's because, if I didn't say those things... Well, I'm happy that she thought about helping me. However, there's a difference between things she can do, and cannot do."

"Yeah."

After going around the huge rock pillar, Saito quickly reached the place they had been just now. The four dragon whale warships entered his vision.

"Alright, now I have to get their attention."

Saito charted a straight path towards the fleet.

While he was advancing towards the fleet, Saito thought calmly about the unknown location of the "Holy Land".

If, this place was really the Holy Land...

Then what did they really have here?

The pope had said something about a gigantic magical contraption here.

What exactly is that magical contraption?

No matter what, he could not really completely believe what the pope had said to him. There was no doubt that they were hiding something from him.

And then there was the thing about Sasha killing Brimir.

And also the fact that Derflinger was made by the elves.

What really happened back then, six thousand years ago?

Mystery after mystery appeared before Saito.

Saito felt that if he did not solve the mystery of what really happened there six thousand years ago, he would not be able to save Halkeginia at all. It was a feeling akin to a premonition.

Saito wanted to put an end to this subtle feeling of "incongruity".

"Hey, Derf."

"What?"

"This is the 'Holy Land', right?"

"Didn't I already tell you? I don't know. I'm telling the truth."

"You're made by the elves, right?"

"Mm, since Luctiana said so, it seems to be the case."

The dragon whale warships noticed Saito's incoming patrol boat, and turned their cannon towers towards him. Saito looked in front of him as he continued to ask his questions.

"In other words, you were made by Sasha, right?"

"When I was first conscious, I was indeed held by her."

Cannon shots were heard, and flashes of light appeared from the cannon muzzles, before they spewed out black smoke. Saito turned the boat's steering

wheel, and the small patrol boat nimbly changed its path.

The shells flew towards an unexpected direction, and left magnificent water pillars in their wake. However, that was all.

"This might only be my imagination. The reason why you've forgotten about it, might it be the Elves' doing?"

"What do you mean like that?"

"Well, if I put it put it this way, maybe you were tampered with so you couldn't remember things that are bad for the Elves?"

"You meant that Sasha did that?"

"I'm saying maybe. These are just some of my thoughts. However, I'm not sure if this was really the case, as I don't fully understand magic."

"What would you do if that really was the case?"

"I wouldn't do anything. I just felt that it wouldn't be right for me to continue pressing you."

Derf's body went clink clank, as if he was laughing.

"You're really a good partner, eh? It's my lucky fortune that I was paired with you. But maybe it's just as you said, that when I wanted to say something, I felt as if someone pulled my guard up, and I couldn't say anything."

They were only a few hundred meters away from the dragon whale warships now, and they could now see clearly see that the warships were outfitted with other small caliber cannons besides the main cannons in the front and the back of the warship.

"Alright, anyway, this marks the end of our conversation. We should focus on the task we have before us, Derf."

"Alrighty, partner."

The small caliber arms on each side of the boat began firing all at once. Saito

made the patrol boat do a quick U-turn. The place he was at just at was peppered with small water pillars where the bullets hit.

After affixing the gas pedal, Saito picked up the rocket launcher beside him and stood up from his seat. He thought the thing he held was the Russian-made RPG7. It often appeared in games.

Saito controlled the steering wheel with his feet while trying to aim the red-tipped warhead at the dragon whale warship. Even though he thought about striking the cannon towers, just destroying one of them wouldn't have any effect.

So he aimed at the ship bridge.

"They don't have 'Reflect', do they?"

Saito remembered how he suffered in the fights of Alhambra and Tiger Street when every blow was reflected back at him.

"It's okay. Only skilled ones can use that."

"And what should I do if there are really skilled ones on board, huh?", Saito thought as he aimed at the bridge, and he pulled the trigger on the RPG7. The warhead shot forward in a flash, faster than what Saito had expected, and hit the bridge.

Luckily, they did not have 'Reflect'. The weapon had a shaped charge, so it easily blew a hole into the thick scales of the dragon whale, and pierced through it. After that, a huge explosion was heard from the inside of the warship, followed by fire and heavy smoke.

However, due to the gigantic size of the dragon whale, the attack barely affected it. Not only did it show no sign of slowing down, its attacks were barely hindered.

"Doesn't seem to have much of an effect, eh?"

"No, we just need to attract their attention."

Saito sat back on his seat and stepped on the gas pedal. The patrol boat revved up, jumping over the small waves, and rapidly approached the dragon whale

warship.

"Come on, look here... Look right here!"

The dragon whale warship turned around and faced Saito.

"We did it!"

Saito snickered, and picked up the small caliber rifle. He fired a few continuous shots at them while steering using one hand. This way, the Elven fleet had to respond with one of their warships. He would lure them away, then escape under the cover of smoke.

This was Saito's plan.

Two of the cannons flashed, and the shells fell near Saito.

Saito deftly maneuvered the boat around to dodge the pillars of water where the shells hit.

"Those damn bastards. Ain't that a good aim?"

It was too accurate even as warning shots.

Wouldn't it be problematic if he was killed?

Saito had a bad feeling about this.

"Isn't it time yet?" Luctiana muttered. A few minutes after they had left, they could still hear some cannon shots, but it was not coming from the stone walls anymore.

That meant that Saito was successful in distracting the dragon whale warships away.

"Alright! Buck up! We're leaving!"

Luctiana chided Tiffania, who was sitting on the small boat in a daze.

"I, really was useless..."

"Hey! Now is not the time..."

"For that."

Just then, a distant voice came from behind them.

Luctiana turned around without hesitation, only to find a troop of elven navy marines, led by a long-haired woman wearing a navy officer suit. She was holding something like a gun.

However, that gun was not powered by gunpowder, and instead used wind-stones to shoot bullets. Even though it was a single-shot pistol, just like guns of Halkeginian design, it was much more powerful, and it had no problems even if it was soaked into water.

It seems like they came through the water. They might have used the dolphins or something, since they were all wet.

"I'm so happy to see you, traitor of the people. Were you going to use a lure to escape? However, we also thought about using lures of our own."

"You're referring to the fleet?"

Luctiana's face blanched in horror after noticing the emblem on the sleeves of her uniform.

"The Steel-blooded Party."

They are a party of elitist zealots who follow the rule that "they will kill every last one of the traitors of the people".

Luctiana prepared to chant magic.

Before she could complete it, the gun was fired and a bullet sped through the air.

"Ugh..."

Luctiana fell to the ground. Tiffania broke out of her daze after hearing that sound and immediately rushed to Luctiana's side to check her wound. Luctiana grasped her abdomen, but hot blood continued to flow out of her wound, dying

her clothes red.

"What are you doing!"

"I'm just giving the traitor due punishment."

Fatima said coolly, and jumped onto their boat. After noticing Tiffania's ears, her face turned bitter.

"You're one of the devils?"

"I'm not a devil. I'm Tiffania. Tiffania Westwood. Tend to her wounds now or she will die!"

"I don't care if she dies."

Tiffania tried to think of a way to stop the blood. She rolled up the clothes and applied pressure on the wound, but there was too much blood so Tiffania was at a loss of what to do.

Fatima walked towards her, escorted by armed marines.

"The devil."

"Wouldn't it be bothersome if we were killed?"

"Humph. It seems like no matter how many times we kill you guys, the power you have will be revived in someone else, but it's only that power. However, even if it was to be revived, we would just kill you guys again."

Tiffania stood up with her hands in front of her chest.



"Kill me then. This has nothing to do with her. Please save her."

"Traitors are even more unforgivable than the devils."

Fatima gripped Tiffania's ears.

"Seems like the rumors about an elf with the blood of the devil was true. You've not only inherited the blood of the devil, but also the blood of the traitor of our people."

Just then, Fatima noticed something sparkling on Tiffania's finger. That was the base of the ring that Tiffania's mother had left her with.

"Where did you get that ring from?"

"This is something my mother left me! She's a gentle person, completely different from you! The clans-people of my mother must also be gentle people!"

Fatima bit into her lips until blood trickled out.

"So it's you then. So this is how you look like. You...You!"

Fatima's face was distorted in hatred. She then seized Tiffania's finger, which had the ring.

"You probably don't know how much humiliation and suffering the 'clans-people of your mother' received because of what you and your mother had done! We lived a life where we were even forced to eat dirt to survive! We were cast away by others as traitors to the race, and we couldn't even buy bread in peace!"

Tiffania's face lost all color.

"You... Are you..."

"Oh Noble Will. Thank you for allowing me to meet Pearl's daughter here."

"One of the clans-people of Mother...!"

Tiffania suddenly fell backwards on the boat. Just as she was about to say something, the gun was fired. Excruciating pain shot up Tiffania's right leg, and she curled into a ball. Fresh blood leaked out of the wound onto the boat.

Fatima reloaded the pistol that had been holstered on her waist.

"This is for uncle."

The gun roared as another wave of pain surged up Tiffania's left leg.

"Don't you worry. I won't kill you immediately. I'll let you taste every bit of humiliation our clans-people felt, and then give you a slow death."

Another gunshot was heard, and Tiffania felt a blow to her abdomen. However, the pain was too much for her to bear, and her senses had already shut down. She felt as if there was a fog in her mind. She could not believe that this was reality.

She felt a faint pang of despair.

"I don't have any friends anywhere."

Even the clans-people of my mother treats me this way...Where should I even go to? No, my final destination has already been set.

It was to be hell. If she were hit by the bullets she would surely die.

"No."

Tiffania felt as if she wanted to cry while she thought about this. "I do not want to die", she thought. "I want to see Saito", she thought.

"I don't want to die."

Tiffania unconsciously pulled out her wand, and began chanting a magic spell. There was only the thought of "meeting Saito again" in her fuzzy consciousness. Now, she only wanted to take a look of the person she loved before she died.

Maybe it was because of this that she chanted this magic spell. If she was calm and collected she would never chant this spell.

This was because there are hundreds and thousands of people in this world. Even though she did not know how the spell worked, the probability for that person to be chosen would be the same as finding a shining grain of sand in the desert.

No, it was impossible.

This was because, Saito was already the familiar of someone else...

"My name is Tiffania Westwood. Pentagon of the Five Elemental Powers..."

Just as Tiffania was chanting the spell, the gunshots never stopped. The bullets hit her shoulder, her calves, and then her abdomen again.

And even so Tiffania continued chanting her spell.

Tiffania was now completely driven by her own sheer will.

Fatima had underestimated Tiffania. Seeing that Tiffania continue chanting her spell in spite of multiple gunshot wounds, the marines began to look frightened.

"Cursed devil! What spell did you think of chanting? Let me have a look then. I have already wanted the tricks of the devil for so long now!" Fatima howled.

Tiffania put in her all to chant the last part of the spell.

"I hereby follow fate's decree and summon forth my 'familiar'!"

The spell chanting is completed.

Blinding white light appeared on the boat, and Fatima could not help but close her eyes.

"Help." Tiffania mumbled as her consciousness began to fade.

"Saito...help me..."

Saito, who had been piloting the patrol boat, was not able to dodge the bright light that had suddenly shown up, and he rammed right into it.

Before Saito has got the chance to understand what was going on, he appeared right on top of the boat where Tiffania had been. The patrol boat had been moving at a speed of thirty knots, so it crashed into Fatima, who had been standing in front of the boat, and they both fell into the sea.

"What's happening?"

The marines began to make a racket.

Saito lifted his head out of the water with a splash. The marines responded swiftly with a barrage of bullets.

"Uwah!"

Saito, who had not got hold of the situation, quickly went underwater to dodge the bullets.

"What? What's happening!"

"Ah, isn't this place the cave just now?"

After Derflinger said that with a deadpan voice, the dolphins bumped Saito up like a ball.

Waves appeared as Saito stepped onto the small boat. What he saw there made him draw in a deep breath.

First, he saw Luctiana, who had been holding on to her stomach and had curled into a ball. And then he saw the pool of blood...

"Tiffa!"

Just as Saito disregarded the problem of how he was transferred here from the patrol boat and was ready to run to her side, the marines started to shoot him again. Saito jumped away from the bullets.

Saito was enraged beyond belief. These guys used the fleet as bait while sending a small team around to catch them off-guard. Their plan had failed. However, it was too late for any regrets.

Luctiana and Tiffania was also shot to death just like that.

Saito was consumed by sorrow and anguish, but he could not do anything about it. Saito glared viciously at the Elven marines.

"You shall not be forgiven."

Just when Saito hopped off the boat, and was ready to deal a killing slash to one of the elves when he landed, Tiffania's voice reverberated around his mind.

"Don't kill them! Or we will become real devils!"

Saito hastily changed the direction of his katana, and severed the gun instead. The elf began to chant, but Saito slammed the hilt of his katana towards his chest and the elf fainted.

The other marines threw their guns away and unsheathed their scimitars.

"Tiffania is still alive." The exaltation of knowing this calmed Saito a little.

No matter what, the shoddy scimitars of the elves could never take a direct hit from Gandalf's katana.

In less than ten seconds, the Elven marines were disarmed and had ran away in disarray.

Saito was ready to rush to Tiffania's side, but Fatima, who had already climbed onto the boat, pointed her gun towards Tiffania, who was barely alive.

"Don't move! Throw that sword away!"

The elven lady looked very similar to Tiffania.

"If you even move so much as an inch, I'll give her the killing blow."

"Won't you just shoot anyway no matter what I did?" Saito said coolly. "Listen up, long ears. If you dare to shoot Tiffania, I will kill you. I will kill you no matter the means."

"You!" Fatima pointed her guns towards Saito.

In that moment, Saito leapt up. He was so quick that to Fatima, it seemed that Saito had disappeared from her vision.

Fatima received a hard blow to her shoulder and collapsed on the boat, Saito being the one who did that.

Even though he did it with the hilt of his katana, it was enough to shatter her shoulder blade. Fatima could not take the pain and fainted. Saito did not even spare her a look and walked towards Tiffania.

"Tiffa!"

Her wounds were grievous. She had multiple gun wounds on her body, and her breathing was weak. Saito nervously tried to tend to her wounds, but he realized that he did not bring any medical supplies.

Saito took Tiffania in his arms.

Grief and agony seized him as he was helpless to do anything. If I were a little more wise...I would have easily predicted that they would have sent infantry here, aside from the cannon ships.

The one who got impatient and was unable to make calm decisions is me.

If, if I had just listened to what Tiffania had said, and at least brought her along with me...

"Tiffa! Tiffa!" Saito yelled twice with all his heart, and Tiffania slowly opened her eyes. Just before Saito could barely compose himself, her eyes slowly turned lifeless again.

"Wake up, Tiffa! Don't go out on me!"

Saito realized that he could not say anything except some cheesy line from a movie. Anxiety and woe swirled around in his mind. Saito was at a loss.

"You managed... to reach in time..."

"I didn't reach in time! I... I'm an idiot. I couldn't protect you, Tiffania... What kind of Gandalf am I! If, If I had brought you along with me..."

"No... It's not like that. I'm, very happy... that I summoned you, and you came. Now I know... where I belong to... That there is something linking me and you..."

Saito's eyes began to tear up. He did not know what to do after knowing that Tiffania thought of him that much.

"Of course you belong here! That's, that's why..."

Tiffania began to chant a spell while coughing.

"My name is Tiffania Westwood... P-pentagon of the Five Elemental Powers... bless this humble being... and make him... my familiar..."

Tiffania held Saito's head weakly. As he looked into her eyes, a gate appeared before him. Saito quickly understood what was happening. Normally if he was someone else's familiar, the gate would not appear. Normally.

However, Tiffania's longing broke this rule. Her longing, the simple desire to be linked to him, superseded the laws of magic.

Tiffania tilted her head downwards. Saito slowly implanted his lips on Tiffania's. He had to do so.

This was because, this was Tiffania's last wish. The melancholy of this wish made Saito felt that Tiffania was extremely adorable.

"She actually thought so much of me."

At the same time, Saito felt distressed and mournful that this was the only thing he could do. He apologized many times to Tiffania in his mind. Tears streamed down steadily from his eyes, each drop falling on Tiffania's cheeks.

Tiffania parted her lips from Saito's, and whispered, "thank you," before closing her eyes.

"Tiffa...!"

Saito wailed, and it was then that severe pain clawed at his chest, like something was being branded on it... The pain was just like when the runes got carved on him back then...

Saito fainted, unable to endure the intense pain, and the suffering that threatened to crush his heart.

Chapter 6 : Joint Committee on Holy Land Restoration

The capital of Gallia, Lutèce. A meeting about forming the 'Joint Armies of Holy Land Restoration' was being held in the Versailles Palace located in the suburbs.

Sitting in the main seat of the spacious conference hall was the pope, Vittorio Serevare. Julio, acting as the pope's assistant, stood behind him like his shadow.

The recently crowned queen of Gallia, Josette, ceded the main seat to the pope and sat on the right side even though this land was her dominion.

However, she was currently occupying the throne under the name, "Queen Charlotte". Josette was actually the twin sister of Charlotte, also known as Tabitha, but to avoid strife, this fact has not been made known to the public.

Meanwhile, Henrietta sat on the left side of the pope. On her side was the Germanian emperor, Albrecht III.

Generals and ministers from each nation took the rest of the seats all the way to the other end of the table.

A heavy atmosphere hung in the conference hall. The first one to break the silence, was Albrecht III of Germania.

"Your highness, I have a few things that need some explaining, would that be alright?"

Albrecht said, maintaining his haughtiness before the pope,

"Please go on."

"Since we are discussing about creating the joint army to reclaim the Holy Land,

do we really have a chance of winning if we just attacked the elves head-on?"

"This is not about having a chance of winning or not. We're about to lose our homes."

"Even if you say that, if we were to simply declare war without thinking it through, it won't end well for us. You should know that doing this recklessly will not only cause our destruction, but also accelerate our own extinction."

"We have a trump card of our own."

"Ah."

Albrecht III deflated immediately.

"And what will that be, exactly? I've heard rumours around. About the revival of the real 'Void Users'."

"That's exactly so."

"The legendary element, 'Void'. If this is true..."

Albrecht looked around him, only to see that everyone looked serious. Mm... He nodded while stroking his beard.

"So it's true then."

After that, he put on a serious expression himself.

"Why aren't you surprised?"

Henrietta asked, a little shocked.

"Did you wish for me to be surprised?"

Henrietta hung her head in shame after he said that. She had always treated him as a fool in her mind.

"Well, I mean, in this day and age we have continents floating up into the air, so it isn't a stretch that legends turn out to be real. However, it's too early to placate me with just this fact. I'm not the same as the likes of you."

Albrecht III said that with the cold expression of a realist. He knew very well of the running joke that his country, Germania, was a country of nouveau riche boors. However, it was clear from his face that his aspirations never faltered in spite of the contempt others had for his people.

"In other words, you want to see the real power of the 'Void'."

Albrecht III's mouth curved up in a smile, as if he had been waiting for this question all along.

"It not only had the power to destroy the Albion air fleet completely, but it also could create large scale mirages in the air... Indeed, that's very impressive. However, we still don't know if this is even effective against the elves."

"Doesn't everyone here know that this is the power of the 'Void'?"

"Even for me, I have only witnessed it from far. However, as far as I know, it isn't possible to use the 'Explosion' spell that had destroyed the Albion air fleet anymore. This is due to the fact that using it will use up one's mental will! I'm not wrong, am I? I can't believe that such previous mental will was wasted in our infighting."

Henrietta looked at the pope uncomfortably. To tell the truth, she had similar doubts. The 'Void' magic that Louise and the pope was able to use was very strong, but would they still be able to use it against the elves in such a liberal manner?

There was also the question of how effective it would be if they used it.

In addition to that, Saito and Tiffania had been captured. Louise had also left to save them. In this case, there were only two 'Void Users' left, the pope and Josette. Was this really enough to form the joint army and reclaim the 'Holy Land'?

Albrecht III continued to press on and said,

"Your Holiness, what do you think is the determining factor in a war? Diplomacy and strategies... might be what you were thinking about, but these are all useless. It is only power, raw power that determines the victor of a war. I only want to know, if we are the ones holding that sort of power."

"Your Holiness, I agree with what Germania has said."

Henrietta was also thinking of the same thing.

"Not only that, we also have a lack of 'Void Users'. Are we really able to win against the elves like this?"

"There is no need to worry about this. We have already set in motion plans of our own."

"Is this true?"

"Yes. I've already sent someone skilled on that."

Henrietta was extremely worried about them. For Henrietta, they weren't mere pawns of war, but her trusted friends.

If it were possible...

Since they were "captured", it means the elves did not plan to kill them. What about Louise, who had entered the land of the elves? She did not get captured too, did she?

"I should have stopped her then, even if I had to tie her up by the neck", Henrietta thought as she chewed her lip.

"Could you please inform me as soon as possible if there are any new developments?"

"Certainly. Well then, I shall answer your questions. Even if the four of us could not come together, our own magic is still very powerful. However, since we can not use this magic at a whim, I can only ask you to trust us."

"And how do you expect us to do that!"

"The Gallian Queen, Josette, sitting has the power to cast a much powerful 'Explosion' spell than what Miss Valiere had done back then."

"So, you're saying that that spell can be used again without fail? And it will be of an even bigger scale?"

Josette, who has been silent the whole time, finally spoke up.

"Yes. I've learnt a few new spells, even if I have not cast them before. However, there is no mistaking this powerful feeling I have within me. As for its power..."

There was a short moment of silence in the hall.

"Can we take that as proof that you will not renege on your words?"

Josette smiled when she heard such a question.

"Well, if my performance can't satisfy you, then I shall cede half of my country to Germania. However, that is made under the assumption that we both still have land to rule over after this is over."

Albrecht III shot a death glare at Josette before taking in a deep breath.

"...Alright, I'll put my faith in your words."

Vittorio smiled as he nodded.

"Well then. We will be going deep into enemy lines to save our 'brothers', before reorganizing ourselves into a larger force and go straight for the capital of Nephthys to reclaim our 'Holy Land'."

"After that, we would be able to activate the dormant magic device, and save Halkeginia from its current crisis. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

However, Henrietta's sharp eyes caught a flash of gloom on Vittorio's face.

"...In other words, I could only wait for Louise and the others to return?"

"That is all you need to do.", the pope said with a tense face,

"We will create an diversion to increase our chances of success. We must attack them with haste!"

Hearing the pope's high-spirited words made Albrecht III laugh out heartily.

"Did I say anything strange?"

"No, not at all. It just that, hearing such fiery words eased my mind. I see, nothing ventured, nothing gained. Alright then, I'll do it. No matter what, we don't have a choice anymore."

"Alright then, I will leave the details of forming the joint army to you two."

Having said that, Vittorio stood up. However, he noticed that Henrietta still looked distressed.

"Is there anything worrying you?"

Vittorio asked.

"No..." Henrietta shook her head. Vittorio then left with Julio. Josette left shortly after them.

Henrietta watched Vittorio leave. She felt that he was hiding something from her.

"This man, has concealed something from us, and it seems to be something important."

Vittorio pressed his temple after he has returned to the room that had been prepared for him. He seemed to be thinking about something, and shook his head.

Julio smiled and spoke as he noticed his master's antics.

"Are you exhausted?"

"It's still early."

"You know, sometimes I'd like to just say the truth."

"Me too."

"How I would like to tell them that the 'magic device' doesn't exist at all, or that even if the four legendary familiars come together and use the absolute 'Void Magic', we still wouldn't be able to prevent the land from rising to the air."

"Ah, how carefully we guard these truths."

"And yet we're still claiming to retake the 'Holy Land'... No, because of that, that's exactly what we should do."

"Ah."

Vittorio nodded.

"A battle in hell awaits."

"Agreed."

The both of them looked at each other after that before breaking into sardonic laughter.

"Will we, be able to cope with all this?"

"We don't really know, until we've tried it."

Just as they were having such an conversation, Josette pouted as she said, "What're you guys babbling about? Isn't today an important day?"

"That's right."

Vittorio and Julio stopped laughing as they turned serious again.

Julio asked Josette, "Are you ready?"

"I've prepared everything. I don't plan to let anyone except Julio to be my familiar anyway."

Vittorio gently reminded her, "Josette, Julio is already my familiar, you know."

"I knew that. However, didn't your Holiness said before? A strong sense of longing, has the power to pull a familiar to my side."

"Mm."

"A long time before, when founder Brimir was summoning the fourth familiar... he managed to 'Re-summon' the elf girl who had already become a familiar."

That's definitely because founder Brimir's loved her dearly."

"Yes, exactly so." Vittorio said so as he was reminded of something he wrote on the "Legacy".

That's right.

During the time when founder Brimir summoned the last familiar, he successfully summoned the elf girl Sasha, who had already become Gandálfr.

"The familiar of 'Zero', will only be summoned through two means. The first is 'fate', and the second is 'love'. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Well then, it would be perfect if Julio became my familiar. Meeting Julio back in Saint Margarita's was my fate. Not only that, there is no one who loves Julio more than I do. This feeling of mine will never be lesser than what founder Brimir had felt."

"Is it really that powerful?" Julio asked with a mocking tone.

"Hey! Don't you believe me!"

"No... It's just that it's too hard to love someone that strongly. Maybe you've never thought that you actually don't love me that much. Didn't they say the love is just like measles. It goes as fast as it comes."

"In other words, I'm obsessed with the idea of loving you? You're trying to say that this feeling of mine, is not 'love'?"

"No, that's not what I meant. I just want to say that the feeling of yours might not be that strong. Hey, Josette, I'm only saying this because I'm worried about you. Wouldn't you be devastated if the familiar you summoned isn't me?"

After hearing this, Josette's expression turned somber.

"Devastated? If, the familiar I summoned isn't you, I will end my life right here and now."

"Hey, don't make such jokes..."

Julio suddenly noticed how serious Josette looked when she was saying this.

"I'm not joking about this. Isn't this what loving someone means? I have already decided this when I left Saint Margarita's. I will follow you all my life, because I love you. If my love for you isn't real, then that would also mean that my determination then was a lie. For me, there is no point in continuing such a life."



Josette took out a pistol that was hidden in her dress.

"Hey, Josette, that is not a toy, you know."

"If, I can't summon you, if I'm unable to make the 'Gate' appear here, I'll shoot myself."

Julio silently thought about how he was going to remove the pistol from Josette's grasp.

"Don't come any further. Take one more step forward, and I will blast my head open immediately."

Vittorio watched her with amusement and laughed.

"You've lost, Julio."

Julio could only shake his head, troubled. He then swiftly unsheathed his sword.

"I understand. If the one that you summon is not me, then I will slit my throat with this sword."

"This is none of your business. This is only about the sincerity of my 'love'."

"You naive child. The sincerity of your 'love', is also important to me. If the 'love' you speak of is not real, then there is no meaning for me to continue living."

A tear emerged from Josette's eye as she heard this. She was so touched that she could only mumble,

"I love you, Julio."

"I love you too, Josette."

Josette held the gun in her left hand as she lowered her head and chanted the spell. The runic melody of the 'Summon' spell filled the air around her...

Julio and Vittorio stayed hushed until the spell chanting was complete.

After that, Josette gingerly waved her wand. Even though only a few seconds

has passed, Julio and Josette felt as if they have experienced an eternity.

With a crack in the air, as if to shatter the grave atmosphere surrounding them, a gate appeared in front of Julio... Josette collapsed to the ground.

"Josette!"

Julio rushed to Josette's side anxiously, and carried her up. Josette gradually open her eyes.

"Don't worry, I'm just exhausted..."

Julio snatched the gun away from her, and threw it to the corner.

"You foolish girl! Were you really going to die if the gate is not opened?"

"Of course I was."

Julio stood up, and walked through the 'Gate'. He appeared before Josette again. It looked just like he went through a plane of light.

Just as Josette wanted to kiss Julio, he stopped her.

"What happened?"

However, Julio did not answer her and instead looked at Vittorio.

"If no runes appeared on my chest, then that would be the case, right?"

"Yes. However, we could say there is zero chance for that not to happen. Josette substituted King Joseph as the new the 'Void User', and as such, the familiar should heed her summons."

"Just like how Miss Valière had Gandálfr?"

"Mm."

"...Then I'm relieved. I don't fear dying for the Church, but I do have plenty of things that I've always wanted to do."

Josette looked confused and asked,

"What do you mean?"

Julio remained silent for a while before shaking his head.

"It's nothing. You don't have to worry about it, Josette. Let's proceed."

Josette continued chanting the spells.

"My name is Queen Josette of Gallia. Pentagon of the Five Elemental Powers, bless this humble being, and make him my familiar..."

And then, Josette kissed Julio.

Julio felt as if his forehead was burning and touched his forehead.

"Are you okay, Julio?"

Julio hugged Josette.

"It's alright... compared to the pain in my chest, this little pain on my forehead is nothing."

The pain on his forehead, bore the heavy truth that he was not "Lífþrasir". The heavy and painful truth burned in his heart...

Julio's heart throbbed in agony as he spoke softly,

"We've really, recreated founder Brimir's brilliant achievement, eh?"

"Mm, the first summon was due to 'fate', and the second due to 'love'. We've repeated the miracle where founder Brimir fell in love with his familiar."

Vittorio nodded satisfactorily and said,

"Well then, the last one would be Tiffania's familiar... Ah, the irony of it all. The familiar of such a gentle girl, would be the bearer of such a cruel fate."

"All of these will be for us, the clan of the 'Magi'. No matter how cruel the fate, we will always have to accept it, for the benefit of the clan."

Julio closed his eyes, and spoke as if he was singing,

"How cruel this fate is, being the 'Void' that will be revived no matter how many times we get killed."

Vittorio agreed with him, and said,

"There is only one way to stop this."

"So, we could only rely on 'him'."

"Yes. If it were him, then he wouldn't make the same mistake as Sasha."

"True." Julio nodded his head.

"There's nothing to be worried about. He's a guy who stood in front of seventy thousand men to block them for Miss Valière."

"In other words, a guy who would definitely die for the person he loves."

Julio looked out the east window.

"If only they could successfully save him."

"Definitely. I hope so too."

Chapter 7 : Onward to the Land of Elves

Above Halkeginia, the "Ostland" soared above the skies. The Gallian airspace was controlled by Romania, so they could only travel through Germania, the country where "Ostland" was made.

Louise stood on the bow of the ship as she surveyed the land on her east. During the journey, she had always been there when she was not asleep.

She looked just like a saint from the legends. A holy maiden, guiding the ship on the scared path as it navigated through the sea of clouds toward unknown lands...

However, Louise's friends felt worried sick when they saw her do this.

No matter how one thought of it, Louise's emotions should have fluctuated a lot.

Saito has been caught by the elves, and he might have lost his sanity, it was impossible... for Louise to stay calm while knowing this. It was not just uneasiness that was gripping her heart.

They never knew when Louise might jump off the ship out of despair.

"Is she alright? She has been looking like that since then." Malicorne asked out of concern.

It has been ten days since the "Ostland" left Des Ornières. The journey through Germania should only take them three days, so they would have been flying above the desert now if they had taken the route past the forest and plains of the "Unexplored Lands", a place devoid of civilization. However, since they had to replenish wind stones mid-way, and there were problems with the engines, they had spent quite some time at a Germanian port restocking wind stones and repairing the engines.

During this time, Louise was still the same. She was not showing any signs of emotions such as anger or anxiety. She simply looked to the east silently.

"Mm... She might be having suicidal thoughts."

Guiche remembered when Louise jumped off the Tower of Fire when she thought that Saito had died, and shook his head.

"I only managed to save her that time because I made a statue of Saito... but it won't be possible to use that idea again this time."

"Hey, we should try to console her, don't you think so too?"

Malicorne spoke with a kind smile on his face as he patted Guiche's shoulders.

"Er... I think it's better if you didn't do anything."

"What are you talking about? I'm the best in the world in consoling girls. The king of consoling girls, Malicorne de Grandpré. There was a long line of girls who got consoled by me back in Tristania."

"Enough with your bragging. However, Louise is really worrying me, we should think of a real way of helping her.", Guiche thought. He crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"What bad things are you guys talking about now?"

A sharp and intimidating voice was heard. They turned around to find a tall slender bespectacled woman standing there.

"Big sis! It's my big sis!"

Malicorne dashed forward to hug her, but Éléonore sidestepped him before gracefully sweeping out her leg to kick him in the stomach with the tip of her feet.

"Oof...!"

Malicorne sunk into the deck like a squashed toad.

"Didn't I tell you before,"

Éléonore kicked his stomach again.

"Not to call me,"

Éléonore put all her weight onto her feet when she stepped on his arm.

"Your big sis!"

Finally, she planted her leg into his face; causing Malicorne to convulse in pain. Éléonore turned her head towards Guiche without even sparing a look at Malicorne.

"Tell me now."

"It-it's not something bad! We're just discussing about whether we should console Louise. Really."

Guiche explained while sweating profusely.

"Seriously! How would idiots like the both of you console her at all?"

Éléonore squinted at them while saying that.

"You're absolutely right. We're nothing but bugs under big sis' feet..." Malicorne said while rolling on the ground in pain.

"Alright, just leave this to me."

"Is this true! Am I blessed enough to see big sis' special consoling skill!"

Malicorne jolted upright, while blabbering excitedly. Éléonore promptly walked towards Louise. Guiche and Malicorne followed behind her uneasily.

"Louise." Éléonore yelled out, and Louise turned around. Guiche was so nervous that he held his breath.

Louise looked extremely calm, like she had achieved enlightenment. However, the atmosphere surrounding her made it feel like a facade that she had forcibly put on herself.

"Is there anything I can help you with, Éléonore?"

"Listen to me, Louise. He isn't the only man on earth. Half of the population are men anyway, so buck up."

"That is the worst way to do it." Guiche accidentally blurted his thoughts out of his mouth.

"That's so cool... pushing her off the edge in an instant... she really is my big sister..." Malicorne breathed heavily while staring at the sisters.

"Eh? Eh?" Louise looked surprised, but Éléonore did not stop there.

"In the past, I also had someone whom I've entrusted my future to. Count de Burgundy, I'd once thought that he was my soul mate... so I was extremely hurt when he canceled the engagement. However, as time went on, I came to an understanding. Love, is really something like the measles. It comes as fast as it goes."

"Mm."

"Talking about personal experiences will just irritate the person you're consoling, won't it?"

Guiche and Malicorne nodded at each other. However, Louise smiled weakly at Éléonore.

"Thank you, Éléonore. I'm grateful that you tried to console me, but I'm fine, really."

"Louise?"

"This isn't the first time I've met with such a desperate situation. However, that guy has always managed to come back to my side while smiling. He only belongs at my side, and I belong at his. This is not just an excuse, this is our predetermined fate. So, it'll be alright this time too."

Éléonore sighed. Guiche, being a sensitive guy, was so touched that he cried.

Malicorne mumbled, "Louise is right, that guy is surely alive somewhere."

"Malicorne."

"I am moved by the love between you and him. I'm so sorry for saying that you're the 'Zero', and for taking you as a fool before."

"It's alright. I'm also sorry for saying all those horrible things to you, for kicking you, and for hitting you back then. I'm really sorry."

"What? Don't worry about that. Right, even though I think that guy will be okay, I'm still worried about something."



"Worried?"

"Mm. It's just, wasn't Miss Tiffania also captured?"

"Yes."

"Listen up, Louise. You have to stay calm where you hear this. In that kind of extreme situation, it's easier for a man and woman to grow closer to each other."

"This seems worth listening to." Louise moved closer to him.

"This might just be my imagination. Um... Well, something like this could happen. 'Ah, Saito, is the end for us?', 'Don't say stupid things like that Tiffa, don't give up so easily.'"

"Go on."

"Saito, could you hug me."

"Wait a minute. What does 'Don't give up' have to do with 'Saito, could you hug me'?"

"Listen up, Louise." Malicorne nodded seriously. "This is an extreme situation, you know. So of course this will happen. 'Tiffa, your chest is so big. It's so much larger than Louise's', 'Ah, Saito. Saito! 'Ah,' 'It feels so comfortable, a chest larger than Louise's'. Ouch!'"

"Can I hit you?"

"How about asking that before you hit me?" Malicorne said, as he rubbed his nose.

"The situation you're speaking of won't happen."

"Fine. It's just something I'm worried about." Malicorne gave a deep sigh.

"Those huge breasts, I've always been thinking about how Saito dealt with them, how do I put this..."

"How do you put this?"

"Anyway, I definitely will ask Saito what he thinks of it. Definitely."

"There's someone I wish dead right here."

"Don't praise me."

"That was not a praise."

"So, what would you do if that happened?"

Louise placed her arms on her chest, and shook her head. "That won't happen. That guy is very much in love with me."

"How much in love?"

Hearing Malicorne's question made Louise realize that it was, in fact, herself who was very much in love with Saito. Her eyes were always on him, and she could not fall asleep without his kiss.

However, if she were to say this, she will be laughed at by Malicorne and the others. This will make her extremely angry so Louise simply brushed her hair conceitedly.

All she needed to do was to find a memory where she 'was loved'. Right, back in Des Ornières, when they made Éléonore angry, and got separated into different rooms...

That guy, dumped the maid and Tabitha, came to my room and hugged me by my shoulders so softly... Kyaa!

He even told me that, I was everything to him... Kyaa!

This is not good... Louise held her chest.

I am, really loved by him.

"Louise?"

"I'm very much loved by him, you know. What to do..."

She was obviously the type of person others would avoid. Nevertheless, this was

a spell that Louise cast upon herself. By doing this, the confidence that she was an unparalleled beauty would well up within her.

"Compared to my love for Saito, Saito's love for me is much stronger. What a fool... What should I do if you're so in love with me? My love for you, is only as large as a pin head, you know. It is as large as the head of an ant."

"However, your love for me, is as large as a dragon's head."

The strength to stand tall no matter what kind of negative situation she was in, filled her heart.

"That guy, is very needy when we're alone together, you know. He'll keep looking at me. And then ask me something like 'could we kiss'? But I'll reject him, if I'm not in the mood for it. Guess what he would do next."

"I don't know."

"He'll kneel down and beg me."

"No matter how I think of this, he'll never do that."

"Oh, it's the truth."

Louise suddenly prostrated herself on the deck.

"Master Louise~ oh Master Louise~ those soft alluring lips of Master Louise~ please allow this stupid dog~ this stupid dog to use my lips to touch them just a little."

After noticing so many eyes on her, Louise's face instantly turned beetroot.

Besides Éléonore, Guiche, Malicorne, Kirche, Colbert, Siesta, Tabitha and Sylphid had also gathered around her.

Louise blushed brightly when she noticed everyone was watching her with dumbfounded faces. If this was the Louise from before, she would have rushed back to her room and hid herself under the blankets out of sheer embarrassment.

However, Louise has changed .

She puffed out her chest and said,

"Humph, that's how much he loves me. So as his reward I will go and save him."

Everyone there broke into laughter.

"That's right. You can't simply let go of such a nice guy, who fell in love with a meddlesome woman like you."

Guiche shook his head as he said that, displeased.

"Hey, what are you talking about? Saito will be fine. He must be somewhere with Tiffania, alive and well." Siesta said with a lively face. She had always believed in Saito. She had the faith that he will not lose to anyone.

"That's right." Louise nodded.

Everyone understood the emotions in their hearts very well. They were almost going to collapse out of anxiety, and everyone was so scared that they did not even know what they have become.

So they were trying so hard to cheer themselves up.

They want to cheer themselves up, but they did not know how. Malicorne, along with Guiche... Even Éléonore too.

Louise thought, "Yeah, I cannot be depressed any longer. How can I lose! At the very end of this ordeal, I have to trust that guy even more. It will be alright."

Saito and Tiffania.

I will rescue the both of you. Louise told herself that confidently.

Even so... It was not enough to expel the anxiety in her heart. No matter how she tried to cheer herself up... The horrible thought that "something bad might happen" rapidly took over her mind.

She could never get rid of that feeling.

Her mind, once filled with hope, will instantly be corrupted by a sense of despair, colouring her baseless sense of "hope" black.

Once the feeling of uneasiness took hold of her, she will lose all of her haughtiness and confidence.

This process has repeated countless throughout the whole week... Louise's heart was at her limit.

Colbert frowned a little after he noticed that Louise sighed as she turned away. He then tried to use a calm voice to tell everyone, "Alright then, everyone, can you all see the river in front of us?"

Under the thick cover of clouds, they could see a river, which ran parallel to the horizon.

"After passing that river, we will finally reach the 'Unexplored Lands'. Well, that place isn't really controlled by the elves, but it falls under their influence."

Everyone tensed up.

"Well, Jean. What should we do from now on?"

Colbert looked around after hearing Kirche's question. Just like a teacher explaining the procedures of an experiment during a lecture, Colbert said with a straight face, "Well then, let me explain the battle plan. It is three hours to sun down. We will wait until night falls before we cross the river. After that, we will chart a straight course to Adyl, the capital of Nephthys."

Everyone took in a chilly breath.

"Is-Is this the battle plan?" Guiche spoke with a dazed voice. They were just charging forward like a wild boar. This cannot even be called a battle plan.

"That's right. We won't be able to use any of our tricks against the elves. The only weapon we have, the the speed of the 'Ostland'. As long as we're flying at maximum speed, no elven ship can catch up to us."

"And what about after we reach Adyl?"

"There is a gigantic tower there, called the 'Kasper'. Something called the 'Council' is located in it. I've never seen it, but it should be a building as noticeable as a castle. This ship, the 'Ostland', will keep storming forward until

we reach it."

"And after that?"

"We will rush down the ship, and capture a high-ranking elven official, or anyone at all as our hostage, and then exchange the hostage for Saito and Miss Tiffania."

Everyone went quiet for a while upon hearing this.

"How... How are we supposed to do this... That's the stronghold of the enemy, you know? What were you even thinking? This is way too reckless. Have you ever thought about how tight security will be there?" Éléonore's eyes widened as she asked this.

Guiche also shook his head.

"Neither do the elves." Colbert said coolly.

"The idea that we would just go straight into their stronghold would never have crossed their minds too. The elves are very intelligent, so they will assume that we're actually some sort of trap and hesitate before taking action. In the eyes of the elves, we're nothing but barbarians, right? So, why don't we just go full barbarian instead?"

"What happens if this plan fails?" Éléonore asked.

"If that happens, we'll just die a meaningful death."

"That's too irresponsible!"

"That's why I won't force you to come with me. All of the staff on the ship has left at the last port. Just tell me now if you want to leave the ship. I could pilot this ship for about a day, even if I were alone."

Everyone got nervous, but nobody said anything about leaving the ship.

"Thank you." Colbert bowed as he expressed his gratitude, and left soon after that. Kirche followed behind him.

"What kind of plan is this." Colbert reprimanded himself while walking.

At the very least, they needed the blueprints of that building and an elaborate strategy, or it would be an herculean task for them to carry out the plan.

Not only that, they were going to save some people, whom they did not even know if they were captured or not, on an unknown land.

They did not even know who to capture as the hostage.

It was a desperate choice.

After leaving them, Colbert mumbled, while sighing, "I'm doing it right, aren't I? No matter how I think of it, we won't succeed. Maybe we'll all die. Even though I know it isn't good to have such pessimistic thoughts... but thinking this over calmly, there really isn't any other conclusion I can make. Seriously, these elves aren't a kind race at all. They won't show any kindness to their enemies. If it was just us, the chance of success is less than one out of a million. Betting on a plan that turns a hopeless situation into a situation where we have a millionth of a chance to succeed... I've been thinking this over and over again, what I'm doing is right, am I not?"

Kirche placed her hands on Colbert's shoulders and said, "To be right or not, that is not the question. The real question is, to do or not to do."

"That's very inspiring. However, I did make something clear. If I let go of this chance, I will regret it for the rest of my life."

"Me too." Kirche laughed.

"Everybody is like that, I guess. That's why they've stayed on. Rest assured, everything will go well. Even though there's no basis for this." After saying that, Kirche sighed again. "But, that kid, is she going to be okay?"

"Yeah..." Colbert became distressed.

"After all, in the end we have to rely on the kid's 'Void', right?"

"Mm."

"Even though she looked steadfast just now, but she's actually at her wit's end, right? Because she's the type to get easily depressed."

"I know that." Colbert was also bothered by this. The only real reason why this plan had a chance in the first place... was the fact that Louise could use her 'Void' Magic.

To defeat the elves in a head-on battle, they had to rely on the 'Void'. What if Louise was hindered by her uneasiness, and could not use her full power?

At that time, they would lose even that one millionth of chance.

However, it was useless no matter how he fret over it. The only thing that could give her some comfort was...

Colbert stopped in his tracks, and told Kirche, "Could you ask that maid... Siesta, to come?"

Chapter 8 : Breaking Through Barricades

Elven patrol airships were very different from the ones in Halkeginia. Even though they were both propelled by wind stones, elven airships did not have sails. Instead, similar to horse carriages, they were towed by dragons.

Compared to Halkeginian airships which were propelled by wind, those elven airships, were on average one hundred and fifty percent faster.

The spheroidal airship, towed by dozens of dragons, moved through the air like an amphibious insect.

The hull of the airship was reinforced with armour, and cannons were fitted into the gaps between each armour plate. Rotating cannon towers, not unlike the ones found on a dragon whale ship, were installed on the deck where the sails would normally be found.

Although the relationships between the Halkeginian nobles and the elves were terrible, trading was still conducted on a civilian level, and it was common for air pirates to attack Elven merchant ships.

The main responsibility of the patrol fleet was to protect the Elven merchant ships from the threat of the barbarian air pirates. This was because even though each individual elf were mighty warriors, the air pirates ships still could take out merchant ships if they attacked together headfirst in groups of dozens.

The "Mestia" was one of the air ships patrolling the skies above the "Unexplored Land". The "Unexplored Land" was the stretch of forest and empty plains between Germania and the Sahara desert. No elf or human lived there. It was a vast piece of virgin land occupied by mostly demihumans... beast-men, ogres, and avian-men.

It was nearly nightfall. However, even if it was night, they could not let down their guard. The barbarian pirates had set up a well-concealed port in the "Unexplored Land", so they could sneak into the Sahara desert under the cover of the night to raid and plunder the villages.

Even though the elves had good night vision, they were still unable to see as well they could in the day, so the guard on duty had to use a special telescope.

It was a telescope that used magic to amplify the moonlight.

Using the gigantic telescope that was directly mounted on the deck, the guard on duty, who had been monitoring the borders, yelled out when he noticed something.

"An unknown ship is approaching, from twelve o'clock!"

The air officer looked through the night-vision telescope on the deck to find the blurry image of a huge ship heading their way.

"It doesn't seem to be a merchant ship."

By the way, the ship had a strange structure. The sails, commonly found on most barbarian ships, were missing, and in their place were two outspread wings, which were a few times larger than normal ones.

"It's fast!"

The guards exclaimed in surprise when they noticed that it was rapidly flying towards to them.

"Show them the signal to stop!"

Under the orders of the officer on deck, the "stop" signal flag was lowered from the mast, and they repeatedly flashed the "Stop now!" signal with oil lamps. However, the other ship showed no signs of slowing down.

"Is it an air pirate ship?"

It was very different from the usual situation. If it was a barbarian air pirate ship, then they would have scrambled away immediately, but it just rushed straight at

them...

The deck officer began to panic.

"Prepare the cannons!"

However, by the time the order reached the guards in charge of the cannons, the strange ship had already reached them, and flew past the "Mestia". The broad wings of the airship made it look like one of the enormous desert birds. However, the sizes of the birds were incomparable to the size of ship.

"What the heck was that ship!" The fleet commander, who heard the commotion, yelled out as he saw the ship that went past them.

"There seems to be rotating fans behind the ship, maybe that's what powering it." The deck officer said, dumbfounded.

"Ah! We'll know it when we see it! Chase after them now!"

"Jean! They seem to be chasing us!" Kirche shouted into the sound tubes from the clock tower at the back of the "Ostland" after confirming it. Her voice was transmitted to Colbert in the engine room along with Guiche and the others on the deck, who were monitoring the situation outside.

"What? They're chasing after us?" Colbert yelled as he struggled with the steam engines. To keep the "Ostland" running at full speed, he had to stretch every piece of machinery to their limit, chant magic spells, control the amount of coal that goes into the engine, adjust the internal tank pressure... so on and so forth. He probably had to continue doing this for the whole day.

Taking the return journey into account... thinking about this made Colbert laugh out bitterly. If they were to just leave this ship aside and rush ahead with the plan, this ship would likely be captured or destroyed immediately.

However, even the speediest Elven airship could not catch up to the "Ostland" when it was running on the highest tank pressure. While Colbert was thinking about something else, Kirche's scream rang through his ears.

"The situation got worse! Those guys sent their dragon knights after us!"

Colbert jolted upright in shock, and immediately rushed out of the engine room to the quarterdeck of the ship. He found five dragon knights closing in on them.

"Miss Zerst, that thing."

Kirche showed a smile once he mentioned about "that thing".

"The 'little flying snakes'?"

Colbert ran to the control panel which was installed on the quarterdeck, and pulled a large lever on the panel. A cylindrical thing opened up its wings, and flew out with a melodic chime.

The magic-seeking missiles called "little flying snakes" were invented by Colbert. They were outfitted with magic sensing equipment in front, and was propelled by the rockets at the back.

After they were launched, Kirche began to chant a magic spell. A gigantic fireball emerged from her magic wand, and sped towards the dragon knights.

The fireball flew in a straight line, and exploded far away from the dragon knights, lighting up the night sky. Yet, the dragon knights increased their speed, as if they were poking fun at the feebleness of the magic spell.

During the instant when the dragon knights were distracted by Kirche's magic spell, the "little flying snakes" unleashed their payloads.

The "little flying snakes" sensed the magical weapons on the elves, accelerated towards them, and exploded right in front of them.

They did not expect that the barbarians would have such a weapon. The elves did not have time to cast any powerful magic. Metal shrapnel and strong gusts assaulted the wind dragons, tearing holes into their wings. The Elven dragon knights fell one after another.

"We did it!"

"Not yet, there are two more."

The two left were the better riders, since they managed to dodge the "little flying

snakes" attack and proceeded to close in on them before casting magic.

The riders' Ancient Wind magic whipped up a tornado, slamming into their direction, but Kirche and Colbert nimbly dodged it.

The tornado crashed into the deck and created a huge hole. Its sheer power scared Kirche nearly to death. As expected of Elven ancient magic, even while riding a dragon, they still managed to cast such an accurate magic spell!

"This is really bad."

If the elves came too close, Colbert and the others could only use magic to defend themselves. If they were to aim for the steam engines, then their plans would be ended prematurely. However, elves had the upper hand in magical battles.

The Elven dragon rides rose up into the air to cover each other's backs, before swooping down again to continue their attacks in a brilliant maneuver.

Colbert and Kirche casted their "Fireball" spell at the elves, but the dragon knights were too fast for them to land a hit.

Riding on Sylphid in the skies above the "Ostland", Tabitha surveyed the situation below her.

They took off into the air just as the battle started. Tabitha understood very clearly what it meant to be the only dragon knight in the "rescue team".

It was impossible for them to reach their full potential while on the ship.

To prevent the moonlight from shining on them, Tabitha masterfully manipulated the wind to turn the wind into a veil of fog around them. Even though this camouflage would immediately be exposed during the day, it was not as obvious during the night. The two Elven dragon knights had not noticed her while they were wrecking mayhem below.

"Little one, there's two more left, you know!"

"I know that."

"If we don't help them now, it will become very problematic!"

Tabitha calmly observed the two dragon knights. One of them was attacking the "Ostland", while the other circled above him and covered his back.

The dragon knights launched their assault as if they were dancing a duet, attacking and moving to the rhythm of combat.

She could not afford to attack without thinking ahead. If she was flanked by the other dragon knight while she was focused on attacking one of them...

"I cannot miss my first spell."

However, it was difficult for her to find an opening.

"If I were to disrupt their rhythm..."

Sweat appeared on Tabitha's forehead out of anxiousness.

Kirche desperately tried to return fire while dodging the Elves' attacks. However, it was impossible for her to land a blow on the elves, who were darting in and out through three dimensions. On the other hand, their spells repeatedly hit the hull of the ship.

"Are you okay!?"

Guiche rushed to her side.

"Isn't that obvious? We can't handle them!"

Colbert was trying his best to protect the propellers. Malicorne and Éléonore were at the helm so they were not able to use any of their spells, while Louise... was probably doing something somewhere.

She could only rely on herself and Guiche to take care of the dragon knights. However, since Guiche's magic affinity was "Earth", he would not be able to use his spells on the airship.

So, in the end she has to think of something on her own.

"What is that kid doing!"

Kirche directed her yelling at her petite blue-haired close friend. If they had Tabitha's magic here, this battle wouldn't be as hard...

Just then, she abruptly understood what was going on. Tabitha, with years of experience under her belt, would not have stayed around doing nothing, and she definitely would have thought of a plan.

"Ah, the sky!"

Kirche said, as she looked up into the night sky.

Tabitha must be waiting for a chance to strike up in the night sky. In that case, what she should be doing would be to...

Kirche shouted out.

"Guiche! Get in the air!"

"Eh? What! Wouldn't I be unable to use any other magic while I'm casting the 'Flying' spell?"

"It'll be alright, Tabitha will think of something, so just go!"

Kirche pushed Guiche off the deck.

"What do you think you're doing? Ah, ah, I'm falling!"

Just as he was about fall off the deck, Guiche began to chant the "Flying" spell, so he slowly floated in the air. Kirche also jumped into the air after him.

Guiche tried his best to fly, but the dragons were much more adept at doing so than him. It was like fighting against a shark in the water.

"Whoa! They're coming to me! They're coming to me!"

Guiche struggled in the air, like a dog swimming in the water. He could see the elf on the dragon raise his hand while chanting a magic spell.

"Stop! Don't do it! I can't swim!" He started shouting out nonsense...

Suddenly, the dragon's body shuddered, as a massive ice arrow went through its

skull.

"An ice spear? From whom?"

The dragon lowered its head and plummeted to the ground with its Elven rider, and in its place was Tabitha who descended with Sylphid from above.

"Oh! Oh! Isn't that Tabitha?" Guiche exclaimed ecstatically.

"As expected as knight of the North Parterre, seizing the chance and striking immediately!"

Kirche murmured after she witnessed one of the dragon knights fall off the sky. The dragon knight who was chasing after her looked away with a surprised direction on his face. Kirche immediately stopped the "Flying" spell, and her body succumbed to gravity. However, as a veteran in magic battles, she quickly began to chant another spell.

Kirche triumphantly unleashed a "Fireball" towards the dragon knight whose attention was diverted by Tabitha and Sylphid. It did not veer off path and hit the wings of the dragon, causing it to burn up.

The wind dragon could not resist the heat and opened its mouth wide, only for Tabitha's "Ice Spear" to pierce through its head. The dragon knight slowly fell down from the sky.

After a few seconds, Kirche felt that her body became unexpectedly light. Sylphid swiftly flew to her and picked her up. Kirche gently sat on Sylphid's back.

Tabitha looked in front of her with a deadpan look on her face.

"Nice work." Kirche caressed her close friend's forehead with a kind look on her face.



Three hours after they defeated the dragon knights, the night deepened further. Clouds concealed the twin moons, and darkness engulfed the land.

Malicorne and Éléonore rotated the responsibility of taking the helm, Colbert worked on the engines which had been weakened due to the elven dragon knight's magic, Kirche was keeping watch of the rear deck, while Guiche was doing the same on the front deck.

Éléonore, who was currently in charge of the helm, gave a worried sigh.

"After breaking into the elf's base, would I come back alive..."

Malicorne answered absentmindedly,

"Mm, well, we did bite off more than we could chew anyway."

"Don't say things like that. Aren't you a man? Think of something, would you please."

"Ha? What are you talking about? Why do I have to think of something just because I'm a man? There isn't such a thing as chivalry during these times, is there? Big sis, you know, maybe the reason that you've lost your chance to live a blessed life was due to that thinking of yours?"

"Who did you say lose her chance to live a blessed life, huh!?"

"Um, well, you got your engagement canceled and all."

Éléonore's eyebrows twitched.

"If I were not at the helm now, you wouldn't be standing up for long."

"Yeah, yeah." Malicorne said dreamily. "As I was saying..."

"Don't joke around. Be vigilant of what's happening around you."

"Hey, I'm vigilant. How about big sis you stay focused on your job..."

Just then, a scream came from Guiche, who had been keeping watch in front.

"Ah! Ah! There's a huge warship ahead of us! They're aiming their cannons at

us! Ah!"

They were probably contacted by the patrol fleet, and stayed here to ambush them after predicting their path. The warship formed an eerie scene as it was gradually revealed by the moonlight under the dark sky.

To say the truth, it was a completely different ship as compared to the patrol ship before. It was enormous, sporting a total of four cannon towers on the deck, two on each end of the ship.

Each cannon towers had two turrets, so all in all there were eight cannons. There was no other word than horrifying to describe the feeling of having all eight large caliber cannons pointed towards them. If they were hit by it, without its armored hull, the "Ostland" might shatter into pieces.

"What is that thing..."

Éléonore said, trembling in fear.

Malicorne's breathing quickened when he saw her like that. So it was something innate after all.

"What happened? Oh big sis, it's so scary, so very scary. Are you afraid of that big warship?"

"Ha? Don't joke around, think of something! Fatty!"

"Then why don't you say 'Ah, the warship is too big for me to handle!'"

"What are you joking about right now!"

"I'm not joking. It's because I want to hear big sis say 'Ah, the warship is too big for me to handle!', you know. You don't want to say it?"

"Y-you...!"

"Old hag. How about 'Ah, the warship is too b-big for me to handle...!'"
Malicorne said this into Éléonore's ears while breathing excitedly.

"As I was saying!"

"Alright, alright."

"No, it's not alright at all!"

Oh? Malicorne muttered as he saw what was happening in front of him. "Ah, they seemed to have fired their cannons at us."

"Ah, the warship is too b-big for me to handle...!" Éléonore, spooked by Malicorne's heavy breathing, screamed as she turned the helm a couple of times around.

The "Ostland" creaked as it made a sudden U-turn.

Meanwhile, in that instant, the main cannon of the Elven warship fired.

The cannon shell that had been fired by the Elven warship brushed the hull of the "Ostland" which had just changed its direction, and flew past it.

"It missed!" Guiche's shout from the front end of the ship failed to reach Éléonore's ears. The fat boy beside her who was holding on to the helm tightly looked like he was going to faint.

"You! If you dare to even joke again now..."

"Ah, that's not what you said, was it? 'Ah, the warship is too b-big for me to handle...!', right? Okay, now tell me! Which is bigger, this one or the one before!" Malicorne continued to say this into Éléonore's ears. Goose bumps rise up Éléonore's spine, and she spun the helm quickly.

During this time, the Elven warship continued firing at them, but unexpectedly, none of the shells hit the "Ostland", which was swerving wildly left and right. Somehow her haphazard steering managed to allow the ship to miraculously evade all the cannon shells.

However, everyone on the "Ostland" rolled around the deck each time the ship turned around.

"What kind of steering is this!" Kirche yelled from the quarterdeck. Of course, Malicorne and Éléonore could not hear them.

After the "Ostland" dodged each cannon shell from the main cannons, it whizzed past the top of the warship.

The Elven warship was not able to react within such a short time at that speed.

The Elves would never have thought that a barbarian ship would be able to fly above them. A normal sail-ship could not be compared to the nimble and fast "Ostland", so the Elven warship was tricked.

"Now is our chance!"

Colbert pulled another lever in the quarterdeck, opening the belly of the "Ostland", and barrels of explosives rained down onto the Elven ship.

The barrels of explosives exploded when they crashed into the deck of the Elven warship. While this was not enough to sink it, it managed to destroy all of the cannons on the warship, and fire spread rampantly across the deck, so they were in no condition to fight.

The "Ostland" ignored the flaming elven warship and continued on to Adyl.

Louise trembled alone in a room within the ship. The sounds of the cannons, and the constant movement of the ship made her terrified.

Everyone was joining the fight, so she could not just stay in the room and tremble alone. Even though she thought this way, she could not move at all.

"Just as I thought, I can't do anything without Saito."

She could not summon her courage. If she did that, malicious thoughts would engulf her mind, she could not take it anymore. That group of elves, after they had captured Saito, they would not just leave him alone, right? They would have taken away his sanity, and he would be just like a doll now...

She did not want to see Saito like that. If she saw him like that, she would probably also lose her mind. Even if they fought so valiantly now, even if they managed to fight their way through...

"To see Saito, who has lost his sanity."

"It's going to be alright." She kept repeating this to herself, but that image simply would not leave her mind.

Why didn't she just, before seeing Saito like that... Once she thought of this, she lost every ounce of her courage to even continue thinking about it. If it was like that...

Just then, someone slammed the door open.

"Siesta..." the person who came in was Siesta. She held a plate of bread, meat and wine.

"Okay! Time to eat!" Siesta said that with a cheerful tone that she had never lost no matter what situation she was in. Louise shook her head nervously.

"N-now is not the time to be eating, right? Isn't everyone else still fighting..."

"The fighting has stopped, you know, for the time being at least. Now, everyone is eating. Okay, didn't I tell you before that you can't fight if you're hungry?"

Louise stared at the food before her. It had been prepared in such a way that they did not require forks and knives to eat it so they could eat it in battle. There was boned meat and bread, that had been cut into bite-sized pieces. Even so, she did not have any appetite at all.

"Thank you for your concern, but it's alright."

Siesta shook her head when she heard Louise say that.

"Don't be like that. I don't care if anybody else doesn't want to eat, but Miss Vallière, you have to eat."

"Why?"

After that, Siesta said with a straight face, "That's because Miss Vallière is the core of this rescue mission."

Louise looked at Siesta with a dazed look, uttering: "I am... the core of this mission?"

"That's right, we can't afford to lose our cool now, can we? The only thing that could hold its own against those scary elves is Miss Vallière's magic. Even though we managed to escape successfully just now, we won't be able to save Saito at all if all we do is to escape."

After hearing Saito's name, tears began to flow out of Louise's eyes, and with that, she began to sob.

"Even if we manage to save him... it won't be the Saito of before anymore... they wouldn't just leave him alone like that, right? They will also take Tiffania's sanity away, won't they... maybe they don't even know who I am anymore..."

Siesta gripped both of Louise's hand tightly, and Louise cried even louder.

"I don't want to! I don't want to see Saito like that, I don't want to at all..."

"Even then, it won't be too bad, right?" Siesta said, with a gentle voice. "Even if he has lost his sanity... Mr. Saito is still Mr. Saito, isn't that so?"

Louise fixed her gaze on Siesta.

"The three of us will live on happily in Des Ornières. If the Pope and everyone else says that it is troublesome for him to be like that, and they want to take his life away... I will pick up my frying pan and fight against them. Miss Vallière, wouldn't you fight with me too? It's likely we will lose anyway, but in that case everyone would rise up to the heavens together, hand in hand."

Louise looked at Siesta for some time, before chewing her lip, and wiping the tears in her eyes away.

Louise felt a little ashamed of herself. Even Siesta has made up her mind...

"Sorry, Siesta."

"Why are you apologizing to me?"

"Even though... I'm a noble, even though I am a 'magic user', even though I have control of surprisingly powerful magic..."

"Yeah, because I don't have all those abilities, so I can just say these things

easily. If I have some impressive power, I probably will just crumble under the pressure. And that's why I'm grateful just to be a normal person."

Louise quickly rubbed her tears away, and stood up.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to fight. I can't just let everyone else fight, I won't!"

Siesta then took Louise's hand.

"No, you can't. Miss Vallière's first job, is to finish this plate of food, then... preserve as much mental will as you can."

"I am, the trump card. The weak and good-for-nothing me, is the trump card."

"That's right. The weak and good-for-nothing Miss Vallière is our trump card, and Miss Vallière is so useless that God granted you this power. Can't you please be more useful to everyone? You're only worth that much because of this power."

Louise could not help but smile at this. "I'm so insignificant, eh."

"You've got that right. No matter your breasts, or your personality, or even the value of your life, they're all so small. What did Saito even see in you?"

"I'll, definitely not be good-for-nothing anymore."

"I think so too."

Louise nodded, and took the tough bread in her hands before biting hard into it. It was flavourless, she had no appetite, but she gulped it all down with a glass of water.

"Fuah!" And with that, Louise began wolfing down the food.

After eating up everything, Louise said slowly.

"Thank you. I've eaten my fill."

"Okay, then let's talk about the future."

"The future?" Louise uttered, looked dumbfounded for a while. "Even if the situation looks so bleak now?"

"Yes, this bleak situation is why we have to talk about the future. We should talk about something happier, be honest with each other and talk about nonsense. Even if we put on such a serious face, it won't change the situation we're in at all."

At this time, cannon fire could be heard again. The "Ostland" suddenly changed its direction. Both Louise and Siesta slammed against the wall.

"Talking nonsense at this sort of time?"

"Of course. Wouldn't that be fun? Just before I die, during the last instant of my life, I still would like to be doing something interesting. Or something like that." Siesta said with an overbearing voice.

Is she serious? However, thinking about it lit something up in Louise's mind.

Louise burned with the desire to antagonize the cheerful and brainless person in front of her.

Didn't Saito take me as a peach-haired fool too? Louise thought.

There was no reason for her to lose to this bubbly idiot. Louise took in a deep breath, and said with a radiant face. "That guy... is deeply in love with me, you know?"

Siesta smiled. "Yes, of course. Even though I don't know what he sees in you."

"After this battle has ended, I'll let him do all sorts of gentle things to me."

"What gentle things do you mean."

Louise whispered into Siesta's ears. Siesta wrinkled her nose and poohed.

"... Miss Vallière, you're so cruel."

After that, Siesta also whispered into Louise's ears, making Louise's ears turn red.

"W-what did you say! Are you crazy!"

"Miss Vallière, that's you. Anyway, as a reward for cheering you up, I want three days out of each week! Lend me three days, okay?"

"Ha? Two days! Three days is too long!"

"... you stingy girl."

"What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything."

"Well, because that guy is deeply in love with me, he might not even go to your side during those three days."

"Go to hell."

"What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything."

In the midst of endless cannon fire, the two girls chatted non-stop gleefully about the man they loved.

Chapter 9 : The Work of the Devil

It was nearly dawn. The national air fleet had gathered in the skies above Adyl, the capital of Nephthys. There were about ten warships that had been outfitted with cannon towers on both ends of the ship. Along with another six smaller patrol ships, there were a total of sixteen ships.

The commander of the air fleet, was the Fleet Commander-In-Chief, General Amran.

"Seriously! What were they doing!"

"The Second Fleet training in the North Sea will be late." The adjutant reported to Amran.

"We don't need too many people for this. We will be laughed at by the Navy for enlisting the elite First Fleet when we are going to be fighting a simple barbarian ship."

"Well, but even the Navy failed at their task of capturing the target..."

After hearing this, Amran relaxed his strict demeanor. "Seriously! Talking, that's the only thing they can do. A bunch of useless fools. That guy would probably start another long and windy lecture again."

"However, Commander, please don't get careless. In the report we received, the barbarian ship moves with such an incredible speed that our dragon warships could not catch up to them. Not only that, they were able to use strange magical weapons..."

"Oh, it was just carelessness on the Mestia's' part."

Just now, the name of the ship that had sunk was also reported to Amran. After it has been defeated by the barbarian ship, the "Mestia" sunk as it was not able to

contain the raging fire caused by the barrels of explosives.

"Also, it was an older model anyway, so it was unavoidable."

"Even so, an incident where a barbarian airship defeats a secondary warship has never been heard of before."

"Well, that's just bad luck. However, luck won't do a thing against this fleet." Amran said as he surveyed the fleet he commanded approvingly. "I will let the barbarians see what the difference is, between us and them."

Just then, one of the dragon knights flew towards them.

This was one of the dragon knights who maintained distance with the "Ostland" while spying on them.

The dragon knight jumped off his dragon once they hit land, and ran towards Amran.

"The enemy has entered Adyl airspace in the north-east-east sector!"

Amran nodded, and raised his right hand. "All ships, full speed ahead! We will meet the enemy outside Adyl!"

On the deck of the "Ostland", everyone was staring to the front. Tabitha and Sylphid, who had been in charge of reconnaissance, landed with a flutter of wings.

"Forty leagues away. An air fleet. Sixteen ships."

"That's a lot." Éléonore gulped. She had not slept since yesterday. There were eye bags under her eyes, her hair was a mess, and her face as of a sickly color.

However, this was not the time to pay attention to this kind of things. Everyone on board had been fighting all night without rest.

"... Will we be okay?"

"Mr. Colbert." Guiche asked Colbert with a tense expression.

"What is it?"

"To be honest, the reason why we could survive until now, is because of damn luck. But it would be impossible for us to rely on luck now. What should we do?"

Colbert coughed lightly. "Now, finally, we let her make her debut."

The ship cabin door opened, and Louise emerged. Beside her was Siesta with an peculiar look on her face.

"For this one strike, I've asked Miss Vallière to rest as much as she could. During this time, she has accumulated a high amount of mental will."

So that was the reason Louise did not join them as they breached the barricade of ships yesterday.

"Louise... are you going to use that 'Explosion' spell?"

Guiche asked carefully. Louise did not answer him and instead simply brushed her hair aside. Every inch of her posture and expression exuded an aura of "confidence".

There was nothing more beautiful in the world than Louise with such radiance. Louise raised her chin, puffed out her chest and stepped forward haughtily. When she walked past Guiche, Louise asked him.

"Who am I?"

Guiche jolted upright reflexively.

"L-Louise!"

"Say my full name."

"You're Miss Louise Françoise Le Blanc de La Vallière!"

"That's right. I have the blood of Tristan's longest-serving and noblest family in my veins. The third daughter of the La Vallière family. This is who I am. Am I not right, Éléonore?"

What is this attitude of hers! Éléonore thought, but she was blown away by her

charisma.

"A-ah! Yes, you're right. You're the third daughter of the La Vallière family, with all our pride and tradition!"

"It won't be a stretch to say that the La Vallière family exists just so that I could be born, will it?"

Even though Éléonore felt that this statement was too much, she noticed that Colbert and Siesta was desperately giving her looks, so she agreed to the statement.

"Ah, of course not! It's also my pride, to have you as my sister!"

Louise continued to walk forward in a haughty manner, and came to a stop in front of Malicorne.

"Who am I?"

Malicorne stood up straight like he had been electrocuted. "You're the world famous beauty, Miss Louise!"

"I don't think this is enough, do you? Put in more effort."

"You're the one and only, amazing unfathomable unparalleled beauty, known throughout all three thousand realms to be so beautiful that if the Goddess of Beauty were to even see you she would run away bare-foot."

"It's nothing special, eh?"

She did not have the air of making it mean "nothing special" at all. Louise continued on, and this time, she stopped in front of Kirche.



"Between the princess and me, who is cuter?"

Kirche found herself to be in a dilemma as she tried to answer such a question. However, she could not let Louise to lose her confidence here.

"O-of course it's Louise! Miss Henrietta, compared to you, is just a pumpkin, you know! A pumpkin!"

"Undoubtedly so. Of course I'm the cuter one."

After that, she stood in front of Sylphid and Tabitha.

"Who does Saito love?"

Tabitha's eyebrows arched high instantly. She was obstinate to her core. Of course, even if she did not think that way, she could not say it.

"Me..." After she said this, Sylphid hurriedly whispered in her ear.

"... Little one! Can't you read the situation?"

Tabitha clenched her fist, her body tensed up as if she was enduring something. Her face then became expressionless and she said coldly, "Louise."

"Aren't you a good girl? You can have him once I'm bored of him."

Tabitha lowered her head and began chanting a spell. Sylphid desperately tried to stop her. "You just have to endure it! Just this once!"

Finally, Louise stopped before Colbert.

"Mr. Colbert."

"Y-yes, what is it!"

"Cute and prefect me was thinking, that dog is really lucky, eh. I can't help but save him, that idiot, that pitiful bug who can't do anything without me. Incidentally, Tiffania too."

"A-ah, yes! Saito is such a lucky man!"

"Sometime he would sneak a peek at Tiffania's chest, that's just an illusion, right?"

"That might be just be an accident! Yeah! If that wasn't the case, I swear on my identity as a scholar that he's just intellectually curious!"

"Yeah, that's what I thought of too."

When Louise reached the ship bow, she swiftly whipped out her wand.

Her movements were so fluid that everyone placed all her previous words and actions aside and allowed themselves to be mesmerized by her.

Kirche said, dumbfounded. "What exactly happened? Did she..."

Siesta mumbled. "I spent an entire night to explain how much Saito loves Miss Vallière."

"How naive is she..."

"She's a naive, willful, needy, incurable person, and it was because she's weak that she has been lingering between self-confidence and self-ridicule. However, that's also why this kind of person, can become a 'holy maiden'. A real 'holy maiden'." Siesta said brightly.

On the side of the horizon, they could see the silhouettes of the elven air fleet. There were sixteen ships in total. They saw from afar how the powerful cannon towers rotated and aimed the cannons at their direction.

Everyone shuffled restlessly after they witnessed this terrifying spectacle. Louise turned around and took a bow.

"Thank you everyone, it'll be alright. I'll take care of them."

And then, Louise looked in front again with an arrogant look on her face. "Well then, long-ears, shouldn't you be returning my familiar to me by now?"

Clear of fear and doubts, Louise began to chant a spell.

When they saw the ship appear, Amran, who was commanding the elven air

fleet, locked his brows in a frown.

"What's up with that ship, it doesn't have any cannons installed on it. How did that thing destroy the 'Mestia'?"

"However, it's moving at a very high speed! It's approaching us rapidly."

"Is speed all they have? Just rushing headlong at us... that makes them no different than the wild boars in the desert."

"Please be more alert. Especially since how they used a sophisticate steering method to evade every cannon shell from the 'Mestia'. It was just like they are telling us that they come with a plan of their own..."

"Plan? What plan? We are the people of the desert, why do we have to be scared of mere barbarian plans?"

"Commander, isn't that train of thought the same as the tasteless views of the 'Steel-blooded Party'?"

"Those guys are just making ado about nothing. It doesn't change the fact that barbarians are still barbarians."

The adjutant looked at Amran worriedly. "The 'devil' is on board the ship, right?"

"The one the navy tried to capture but failed?"

"No, I don't think it's the same one. However, legends did mention that there were multiple 'devils'."

"Why are everyone so afraid of this 'devil'? Barbarian magic-users have to swing their wands to use magic, without it they are useless. The only thing they have in plentiful amounts is pride. Anyway, that devil will just be a little stronger than normal barbarian magic-users."

"However, one of them escaped even after being surrounded by the Navy. Commander, please don't let your guard down."

"Are you trying to put the 'Navy' on the same level as us, the 'Air Force'? How can those brainless turtles who only know about paddling mindlessly in the

water, be compared to us, the incarnations of dragons?"

"No, that's not what I meant..."

"Humph, we'll just crush them in one go, no matter if they are the 'devil', or some moth larvae. One volley of our cannons will crush them! Full speed ahead! Turn that barbarian ship into dust!"

The dragon tamers controlling the dragons shouted "Understood!" enthusiastically and the flagship started to glide forward. The Elven ships began to move forward in a neat straight line. For the Elves, this was their technology.

The adjutant took his telescope and monitored the "Ostland" out of worry.
"Ah..."

"What is it?"

"There's a young girl standing on the bow of the ship."

"A young girl? What about it? Is she going to curse us? Or is she a living sacrifice? Or maybe she would be shooting us with a gun?" Amran laughed at his own joke.

"No...she seem to be chanting some kind of spell..."

"Oh, so be it. Let her do anything she wants. The barbarians would need some magic that has a larger range than our cannons anyway!"

Aiolu. Sunu. Feyr. Arushakusha.

Louise did not stop chanting. That was the "Explosion" spell that she had chanted for more times that she could count.

The melody of the spell has already become an part of Louise's body.

A melody passed down from ancient times.

The Founder's whispers.

As she chanted, she felt as if all her emotions have been rearranged and reorganized. Joy, anger, sadness, and happiness. Those feelings mixed together

as one, as if they were trying to find a place to be vent out.

Onu. Sunu. Uriu. Ru. Raduo.

It was just like the waves. It was just like music.

"Magical power is proportional to one's emotions." She did not know who was the one who said this. If her fluctuating emotions were what affected "Explosion"... then there is no other magical spell that suited her more.

Piosuran. Uru. Suoieru. Kanuo. Oshura.

Louise stared at the large Elven air fleet, leagues away from her.

They no longer looked that terrifying to her.

To defeat that air fleet and save her beloved familiar, that was her predetermined future. She already knew this when she chanted the spell.

She felt a little tipsy, like she had a slight fever.

This tipsy feeling was comfortable, and it made Louise even calmer.

Zera. Isa. Uji. Bazaru. Beokuen. Iru ...

After that, a special feeling emerged within her.

"I'm... heading towards the 'Holy Land'." It was as if a program inserted the phrase into her mind.

"The 'Holy Land'."

The promised place, somewhere in the land of the elves.

That phrase has been carved into her soul.

That phrase, repressed all of Louise's emotions. All of her emotions felt as if they were about to rush out of her body to the beat of the spell incantation. Louise surrendered her body to that feeling.

After she finished the incantation, Louise swung her wand.

The first thing Amran saw was a small ball of light. That light ball appeared in the air in front of the fleet and gradually grew in size.

"A tiny sun has appeared", was his first thought.

Then he realized that it was magic.

Barbarian magic? From the girl on the bow?

Before he could apprehend what was going on, a gust of strong wind slammed into his body. He was thrown onto the deck.

"Ugh...!"

Amran shook his aching head as he got on his feet. He was surrounded by chaos. Fire ravaged the ship, and seamen lay around him.

The usually tame dragons rampaged and flew towards different directions but they were bound to their restraints so they could only wail in despair.

Amran shakily approached the side of the ship to see how the other ships were doing. All of the ships in the fleet had been destroyed. They were consumed by fire and fell towards the ground.

"... What happened."

He could not understand the current situation.

Just a few minutes before, his fleet was still pressing the assault majestically. They should have been able to destroy that presumptuous barbarian ship in one hit.

Why?

Why would this happen?

Even if that was magic that I had never seen or heard of, why would an Elven fleet lose to barbarians..., he thought.

And to lose to that one ship!

"We were done in by that one girl... Huh."

The adjutant, covered in blood, staggered towards him. "Commander, I'm a afraid that, this ship is no longer able to fight... Please make the order to retreat!"

What he has said failed to enter Amran's ears at all. A single word had took hold of his mind.

"It's the 'devil'. Those guys, released the 'devil's' magic!"

The flagship Amran was on slowly tilted.

The ship dipped to one side. If the wind stones they have on the ship did not disappear all at once, the ship would not fall from the sky.

The 'devil's' magic, had destroyed all the wind stones.

The wind stones were a product of Elven magic, and so if they were to disappear that would mean... He was frightened by the work of the devil.

"Oh Noble Will, may you save us, from the work of the devil..."

He would no longer be able to know if his prayer was heard. The warship succumbed to gravity and slowly fell from the sky.

Everyone on the "Ostland" seemed to have forgotten how to speak for a moment, and simply watched on as the Elven fleet plunged to the ground.

The only one among them had seen a full fledged "Explosion" from Louise was Siesta, back in the village of Tarbes, when she annihilated the Albion air fleet, the miracle light...

Louise's legs suddenly went weak, and everyone ran to her anxiously.

"Louise!"

Éléonore nervously held her sister's body in her arms.

"Mm..."

"... She's asleep."

Éléonore sighed contently, after she has been assured of Louise's safety.

"Let her sleep for a while. It's been some time since she last did." Colbert said, and everyone nodded in agreement. Even though they have taken down the Elven sleet, this was not over yet.

Moving on at maximum speed, soon enough white pavements appeared before the "Ostland".

"That would be Adyl, the capital of the country of the elves."

Colbert pointed at a distance. Everyone began to tense up.

"Well then, the real show starts now. Is everyone ready?"

Guiche and Malicorne gave an absentminded nod while Éléonore nodded with a determined look on her face. Kirche looked straight in front and Siesta looked worriedly at Louise.

Maybe it was because they saw the power of the "Void"? The little flame of hope lit up in everyone's heart. No matter how tough the situation was, didn't they conquer them all? Such was the hope they held in their hearts.

Of course, this was also based on shaky foundations. Well, Louise could not possibly release another "Explosion" like the one before within such a short time, right?

However, she did have some other spells of her own, didn't she? Anyway, those spells could be used on the elves. Not only that, there was the undeniable truth that they had already arrived at this place.

The Elves were not invincible foes.

Their hearts filled with profound and great confidence, the "Ostland" cruised on the desert wind as it made a beeline for Kasper, where the highest Elven authority, the "Council" was located.

Epilogue

The loud rumbling sounds and the constant motion shook Saito awake. He slightly opened his eyes, only to find himself in a cocoon-like cabin. He had been sleeping on a simple bed affixed to the cabin wall.

"Are you awake?"

Saito jumped at the question. He saw Arie looking at him with a snappy face.

"Bastard! Why did you do that to Tiffania!"

He wanted to get up and punch him, but he was restrained by Arie's subordinates, Madhav and Idris.

"Hey, hey, don't be mistaken. I was the one who saved you. Even though it was just a coincidence."

Saito then noticed Tiffania and Luctiana who were sleeping on the wall opposite of him.

"Tiffa!"

Saito quickly rushed to her side. Tiffania's body was covered in bandages. Her face and nose were covered with something resembling an oxygen mask, and tubes were inserted into her body. Luctiana, sleeping in a bed perpendicular to Tiffania's, received the same treatment.

Even though Tiffania's eyes were closed, slight movements could be seen on her chest.

"Is she still alive?"

Arie nodded in response to Saito's question. "That's right. If we had come just a

little later, then there was nothing we can do with the equipment we have here. We only managed to reach you after everything was over because we had to evade the Navy."

Saito breathed a sigh of relief, and tears flowed down his cheeks.

"Thank goodness... Thank goodness..." Saito repeated as he held Tiffania's hand in his grasp for a while.

"Shouldn't you be thanking me too?"

"Why did you save us?" Saito could understand why Arie would come to save Luctiana, seeing as deep down inside, Arie was in love with Luctiana. He would rather be branded a traitor of his people than watch the fiancée he loved get killed.

"That's because if I save Luctiana, then we're all wanted people. So even if I don't want to accept this, I could only escape to the country of the barbarians... Gallia. It would be dangerous for us to go alone, so we need your help." Arie explained with a distressed face.

"Where's my sword?"

Arie pointed beside the bed, where Derflinger and a few small automatic pistols could be found.

"We grabbed your weapons too, since you'll be needing them in the future."

"What do you mean by that?"

"The Navy... planned to have all of you killed. They failed to do that, so I would imagine that they will get very upset and start searching the area around the 'dragon's nest'... I believe that they will notice that we're long gone and send troops after us. No, they might have already did that. This is not some vacation trip, so at least help us a little."

"Won't it be troublesome if we get killed?"

Arie sighed. "We're not as united as you think we are. Maybe it's the same on your side too."

Just then, Saito noticed that there was another young woman sleeping there. She was undoubtedly Fatima, who had previously shot at Tiffania without hesitation.

"She's here too!"

"We can't just leave her alone, can we?"

Saito shot a hateful glare at Fatima. She seemed to have lost consciousness, and was snoring lightly. He was burning with the urge to jump on her and strangle her little neck. However, Saito suddenly felt that she looked very similar to Tiffania.

I should stop, he thought in his head. After all, Tiffania was alive, somehow. If he had allowed himself to be possessed by anger and murder this woman... Wouldn't that make him the same as her?

"If she does this again, I will never forgive her", Saito swore in his heart.

After that, Saito looked outside the cabin window. He was surprised to find water outside the window. It seems that they were moving in the sea.

"Isn't this a submarine!"

"Submarine? This is a sea dragon ship, you know. Well, we haven't really used it much, so it's normal for you to be surprised."

It seems that the Sea Dragon that had fought with Saito before was now towing the ellipsoidal ship. "You guys really like to use dragons to tow all kinds of things, huh", thought Saito.

Saito stared at Arie.

"Is there anything else I can help you with?"

"There's something I would like to ask you."

"More questions? You are really troublesome."

Saito asked, straight to the point. "That 'dragon's nest' is the 'Holy Land', am I right?"

Madhav and Idris immediately stood up, but Arie stopped them. "That is not my question to answer."

Arie and Saito stared at each other for a moment.

Just then... Tiffania, who had been sleeping on the bed, opened her mouth a little.

"Saito..."

"Are you awake? Tiffa!" However, it does not seem so. Instead, she was only calling out for Saito in her dreams.

"Saito... Saito... Where are you? Don't leave me alone..."

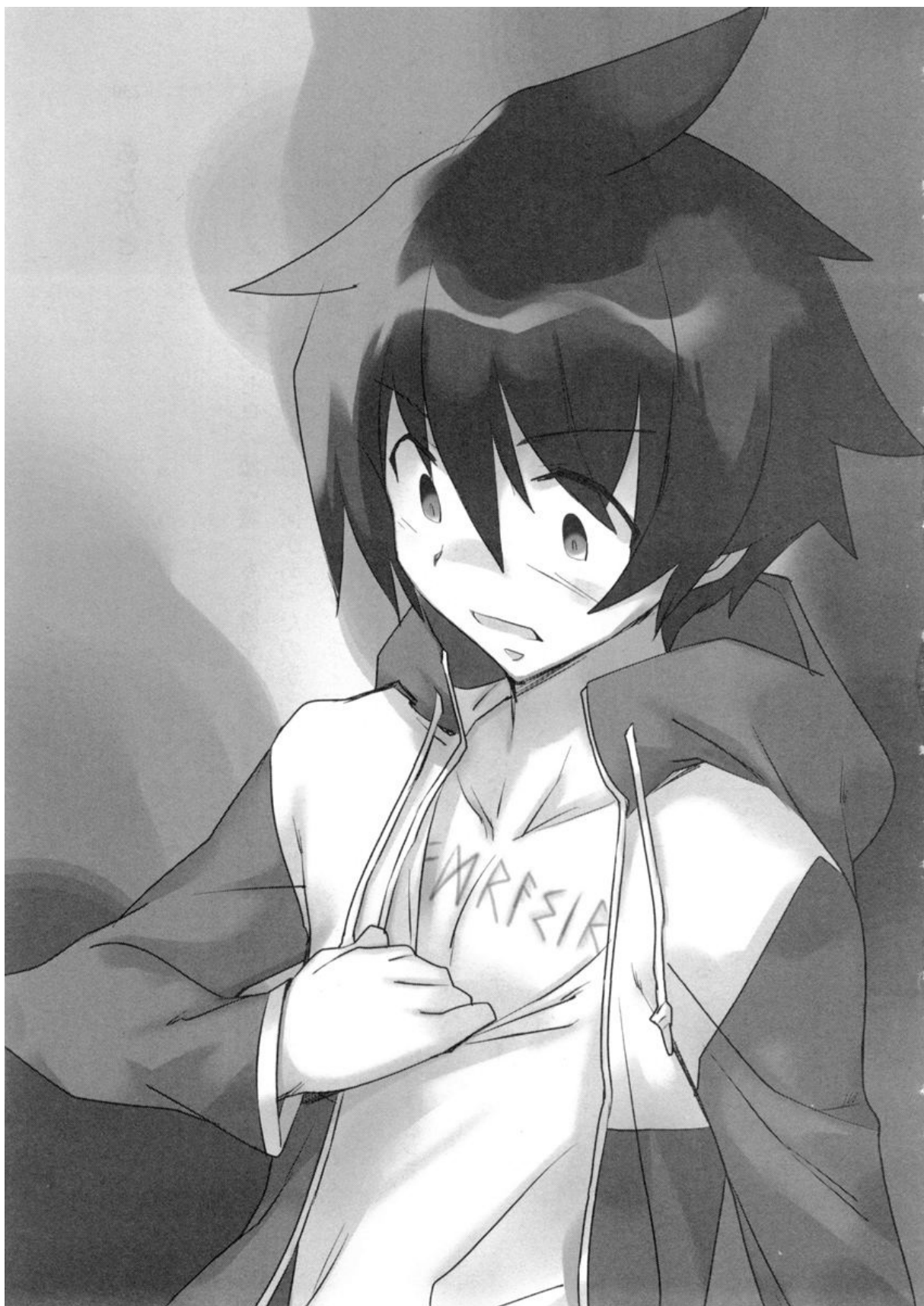
"Here, I'm here, it's alright now, you've got me by your side."

"Saito..." Tiffania closed her lips, and silence returned to the ship.

"I have to return to Gallia... to tell Louise and the others about this."

Now was not the time to be worrying over Arie and Luctiana. It was understandable that they had helped him, because they knew things would end up like this.

He felt his chest burn in pain as he held Tiffania's hand. Saito opened up his shirt in fear, and peered at his chest.



There were unknown runes engraved clearly on his chest.

"This is..."

The runes of, a familiar...?

He thought about how he made the contract with Tiffania before. Then, this really was... the contract of a "familiar"?

An overlapping double familiar contract?

Could this happen?

Saito held on to Derflinger beside him. The runes on his left hand shone brightly. So he still has his Gandálfr powers.

"Hey, Derf, what are these runes on my chest? Does this mean I'm Tiffania's familiar? Even though I've become Louise's familiar?"

However, Derflinger did not say anything.

A peculiar uneasiness crept into Saito's mind.

The gradual revelation of the mystery around the "Holy Land", the runes engraved on his chest... A feeling that he was going to be dragged into a complicated and ancient darkness masquerading itself as 'destiny', this was the sort of opaque uneasiness that has eaten into his mind.

"What... will happen to me? Louise..."

Saito said as he faced the window. Twilight extended beyond the window, coloring the seawater around him in various shades of darkness.

Afterword

Well, well, the story of Zero no Tsukaima is coming to an end. The mystery of the "Holy Land" is slowly being revealed. Likewise, what really happened six thousand years ago? To be honest, I would have never thought that I could have come this far, so there were a lot of emotions welling in my chest. Even though I plan to finish the story in another two volumes, I'm still worried if I could finish writing them. However, I should not be saying such negative things, and I should be giving it my all instead!

My boy Saito, has also grown up bit by bit over the years. Well, teenagers tend to grow up after they have found their direction in life anyway. This has also been said by Louise somewhere in the story, though it was only for a brief moment. A brief but brilliant moment. Although the willful part of her and the core of her personality will never change, there is bound to be some other part of her that will undergo a metamorphosis of her own. The girls are not the only ones who have undergone development, you know. As a buddy of almost every boy and young men out there, I also want to cheer for the guys in the story. Even if I won't be doing anything specific at all.

In any case, a young man with passionate dreams of upholding justice will always be a radiant symbol to others.

I sincerely hope that everyone reading this book will also find "something that they want to do". Although it might be hard to find it in this day and age; however, no matter the era, it will always exist. The "something you want to do".

There are still some things I have to mention before the end. Even though we're almost near the finish line, I still want to thank Mr. Eiji for your beautiful illustrations for this volume! You've not only increased the quality of the illustrations, but also your drawing speed every year. That is really impressive, Mr. Eiji is really a special person. I'll have to reflect on that.

There's also Mr. S, my editor. Mr. S was the one who made this volume possible.

It has been seven years since we've first known each other, and I am very thankful for you being here all this time! It is not an exaggeration to say that Mr. S was the only reason that I got to hold on until now. I hope that you will continue putting in your all in the next volume! Thank you very much.

Alright, everyone reading this volume, there's just a little bit left, so I wholeheartedly hope that everyone will accompany us to the end. Writing this made me feel like I was talking about a different life. There is no greater honor as an author than this.

Well then everyone, please look forward to the twenty-first volume!

Noburu Yamaguchi

Notes

1. ↑ , ara ara. This expresses something like "Oh my!"
2. ↑ , aiya aiya. Something like a mixture of tut-tut and 'scuse me.